REPORT RESUMES

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SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING OLD. DIFFICULT LITERATURE--A READER'S VIEW. LITERATURE CURRICULUM VI, TEACHER AND STUDENT VERSIONS.

BY- KITZHABER, ALBERT R.
OREGON UNIV., EUGENE
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THE FIRST OF THESE TWO 12TH-GRADE LITERATURE UNITS, "SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING OLD," IS DESIGNED TO HELP STUDENTS TO RECOGNIZE EXPRESSIONS OF COMMON EXPERIENCE PRESENT IN LITERARY WORKS REGARDLESS OF WHEN THEY WERE WRITTEN. WORKS SELECTED FOR THIS UNIT ARE GROUPED UNDER FOUR TOPICS--"YOUTH AND AGE," "THE NATIVITY, CHRISTIAN TRADITION," "CONFLICT OF GENERATIONS," AND "THE INDIVIDUAL IN CONFLICT WITH SOCIETY." THE SECOND UNIT, "DIFFICULT LITERATURE--A READER'S VIEW," IS INTENDED TO GUIDE STUDENTS IN ISOLATING THE PRINCIPAL DIFFICULTIES OF READING LITERATURE AND IN EVALUATING THE VARIOUS JUSTIFICATIONS FOR LITERARY DIFFICULTY (E.G., HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL DISTANCE, AUTHOR ORIGINALITY, AND THE COMPLEXITY OF THE WORLD). THE STUDENT VERSION CONTAINS AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS, AND THE TEACHER VERSION PROVIDES DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND INTRODUCTIONS TO UNITS AND TO LITERARY SELECTIONS. FIVE TESTS DESIGNED TO ACCOMPANY THESE UNITS ARE APPENDED. SEE ALSO ED 010 129 THROUGH ED 010 160, ED 010 803 THROUGH ED 010 832, TE 000 195 THROUGH TE 000 220, AND TE 000 227 THROUGH TE 000 249. (RD)

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DIFFICULT LITERATURE: A READER'S VIEW

Literature Curriculum VI
Teacher Version

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DIFFICULT LITERATURE: A READER'S VIEW

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Teacher Version

Something New, Something Old

"Why do we have to read all this old stuff? Who cares about the Middle Ages, and Shakespeare, and the Greeks now?" It is not always easy to find a convincing answer to this recurring question. Why indeed do we read the old as well as the new? It is an honest question and deserves an honest answer.

Quite often the classic is indisputably better than a comparable modern work. The Glass Menagerie is a good play, but is it as great a play as Hamlet? Will it still be acted on the stage three centuries from now? Time is selective; it is a critic of taste and judgment. That which passes the test of time is usually superb.

There is another and perhaps more inclusive reason for our study of classics. They are the embodiment of our common human experiences. In them, time and space are transcended, and we become deeply aware that, as John Donne has said, "No man is an island entire of itself." Thus the universal appeal of good literature is perhaps explained not solely by the content of the work but more importantly by the response of the reader to its artistic unity. Any true aesthetic experience moves the depths of our human nature. It is never merely an intellectual experience, not purely an emotional one, but a blending of all our faculties that awakens in us an awareness that we are only "a little lower than the angels."

Few great artists have achieved this miracle of response, and many of these have produced only one work that stirs us profoundly time and time again. It is never merely the subject of a literary work, although there are some subjects of universal interest, but the way in which the idea is expressed that makes it memorable.

Perhaps it is asking too much of a student to expect him to recognize immediately the worth of an artistic masterpiece. Discrimination and the cultivation of good taste develop slowly, and require careful nurturing. Only through repeated exposure to good literature will he be able to appreciate it. This will be our primary concern for the year.

We have attempted in this unit to bring together selections from different times, as well as a few from other countries, that the students may discover for themselves what constitutes excellence in any genre. The Greeks recognized it as a creative power when they took their title from "poiein", meaning to create, and the Romans felt there was something prophetic about it when they named the poet among them "vates" or seer. The Scotch called him a "makkar". All will agree that he takes the raw material of life and shapes it in such a way that it becomes a unity, artistically whole and beautiful.

The unit begins with A.E. Housman's poem, "On Wenlock Edge." This lyric will set the mood for the unit since it makes us conscious of the present being deeply rooted in the past. The rest of the unit has been divided into four parts, each dealing with a major theme illustrated by at least one old work paired with one or more recent works. It is not expected that all classes will read all the selections. Some works are more difficult than others, so the teacher will be able to choose works appropriate to the ability of his students. An entire part could be omitted without altering the purpose of the unit.

We hope, through this conscious process of reading the old and the new side by side, to help the students discover for themselves that some works remain relevant, no matter how long ago they were written.

The purpose of the first part is to make clear to the students that the attitudes of the young and of the old differ no more today than they did centuries ago, for even in those days youth was as determinedly adventurous as age was cautious. The part begins with "The Seafarer," an Anglo-Saxon poem that will appeal especially to the adventure-minded youngster, as well as to the more reflective one. Perhaps he will recognize a contemporary spirit in this work. This is followed by Conrad's Youth, which enlarges upon the theme of youth's impatience with a settled life, and the exuberance with which adventure is sought and met head-on. The blending of epic and romance, physical and spiritual courage in the face of elemental dangers, and the nostalgic memory of these experiences, which are merely hinted at in "The Seafarer," are brought vividly to life in this story.

Man, as he grows older, tends to look backward to his childhood with longing. Across the impassable chasm of years, he sees his youth as perfect. To show the student the universality of this attitude, we selected an ancient Chinese lyric, "Retrospect," in which the author describes his return to the home of his childhood, and compared it with Dylan Thomas' poignant "Fern Hill."

Writers have turned to the nativity as a theme in each generation. The second part contains a medieval drama, "The Second Shepherds' Play" from the Wakefield cycle of Miracle plays, paired with T.S. Eliot's "Journey of the Magi." These selections will make the student aware of the pervading Christian philosophy which has profoundly influenced western thought and behavior. A third selection, "The Second Coming," by Yeats, illustrates the writer's use of the Christian tradition to make his own particular statement. Students are prone to accept prevailing attitudes without being conscious of their origins; even those who rebel are not always sure exactly what it is they are rebelling against. Literature reflects the history of these traditional attitudes, their continuity from past to present.

Since conflict between the generations is a universal theme, we have grouped together the bible story of "David and Absalom," Miller's "All My Sons," and Hemingway's story, "Soldier's Home." To further emphasize the fact that the trouble the old have in understanding the young is nothing new, we have also included another Chinese lyric (500 A.D.), "Putting the Blame on His Sons," which expresses, as students will no doubt be quick to recognize, the dark suspicion with which father's sometimes view the rather normal antics of the young. These selections will demonstrate to the student that the conflict between the young and their elders, so prevalent in our generation, is not unique to the twentieth century.

Antigone is an ancient work dealing primarily with the individual in conflict with society. A modern example of the same dilemma is Koestler's Darkness at Noon. These selections will show the students the concern man has long felt about his place in society, which takes precedence, the individual's conscience or the demands of the state? Should draft card burners, for example, be tolerated in a democracy?

The universal themes encountered in these and other works might be stated differently. Coming of age, facing responsibility for one's actions, the impossibility of returning to the past, one's encounter with the religious or social traditions of his community, are all universal human problems which differ in their specific context of time and place and yet call forth common human reactions in all of us. This universality of human nature is reflected in literature, both the old and the new.

SUGGESTED SELECTIONS

As an introduction: "Wenlock Edge" by A. E. Housman

Part one: "The Seafarer," from Old English Poetry, translated by J. Duncan Spaeth, Princeton U. Press

Youth by Joseph Conrad.

"Fern Hill," by Dylan Thomas, Immortal Poems, ed. by Oscar Williams.

Part two: "The Second Shepherd's Play" from the Wakefield Cycle

"The Journey of the Magi," T. S. Eliot.

"The Second Coming," by Yeats.

Part three: "David and Absalom," King James Version.

"All My Sons," by Arthur Miller.

"Soldier's Home," by Hemingway.

"Putting the Blame on His Sons," by T'ao Ch'ien, from *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Early Times to the Fourteenth Century*, compiled and edited by Cyril Birch, Grove Press, N. Y., 1965.

Part four: *Antigone*, Sophocles.

Darkness at Noon, by Arthur Koestler.

Something New, Something Old

Introduction:

Housman's "On Wenlock Edge" takes as its subject the ephemeral existence of man in the face of time. The poem is an appropriate beginning for this unit because it makes a clear connection between the "old" man and the "new." Both the ancient Roman and the contemporary Englishman were men, blood-warm and living, who looked upon this scene and the passing seasons. Perhaps human mortality is one of the most recurrent themes in literature, and has often been coupled with observations on nature, for man sees in the earth, as in this hill, something solid and lasting, and in the seasons with their annual cycle of life and death a reflection of his own condition.

But each writer bends the theme to his own personal statement. Here the particular details of the scene give vitality to the restatement of an old idea. The last two lines of the poem give added meaning to the statement. There seems to be a measure of comfort and a sense of irony as well in the lines. We infer that the speaker too has "his trouble" just as the Roman did, and the woods do now. As he draws the comparison between himself and the ancient Roman he may be diminishing the significance of his own troubles in the face of time, for "The tree of man was never quiet."

Part One: Youth and Age

Perhaps high school students will not be able to understand the nostalgia of maturity looking back at the optimistic courage and visionary dreams of youth, but certainly they will understand the eagerness of youth to test its strength against the challenges of life. Traditionally the sea has become a symbol of life itself, and for generations the sea has afforded youth the opportunity to seek adventure and test emerging manhood. Wrapped in myth and romance, the subject of as much bad writing as good, the powerful attraction of the sea nevertheless remains a fresh experience for each one who meets it. The man who seeks the solitary life of the sailor, the mystical experience of loneliness and the challenge to his physical strength, may feel that he has come close to discovering the meaning of life. In the words of the psalmist (Psalm 107): "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep."

It is appropriate, therefore, that our introductory selections should be works set against the background of the sea. The first, "The Seafarer," is an Anglo Saxon poem of unknown date and authorship, but it was probably written in the eighth century. It takes the form of a dialogue between a weather-beaten old sailor and a youth eager to set sail. The translation by J. Duncan Spaeth has maintained the alliterative quality of the original Anglo-Saxon poem, and should be read aloud for a greater appreciation of the rhythm and the appeal to the ear. As the translator has commented, "The older the poetry, the more vocal it is."

Although the poem consists entirely of the old man and the young man conversing, it is not a dramatic poem. The students will readily appreciate the lyric nature of the work, and they should certainly be encouraged to use the knowledge of form they have gained through the previous year's experience to discuss its artistic qualities. This surely is the main reason for its survival. Countless poems have been written about men and the sea. Why then should this poem survive while others have not?

The poem begins with a recounting of the hardships of the life of the sailor. Then the longing for adventure, for the test, for the restless life of seafaring, is set forth. This leads to a meditation on the passing of material things, a sort of weighing or evaluation of the spiritual and material values. Some critics see this poem not as a dialogue but as a monologue in which the speaker expresses two sides of his feelings. But this viewpoint does not materially affect our interpretation of the content, for the values expressed still seem to stand for the contrast between youth and age, the conservative and adventurous ways of life.

Youth is perennially eager to seek adventure and prove its newfound strength. Perhaps each generation is tempted to feel itself unique in this respect. The recognition of the same yearning in a poem over a thousand years old should make the students aware of the common human bond that unites them with the past. As they continue to study old works in this unit, they will become increasingly aware of the universality of the human condition.

Writing eleven centuries later, Joseph Conrad also gives lyrical expression to the hope, courage, and joy of youth in his modern epic of the sea, Youth. Although Youth is a prose narrative, the students will recognize some of the same qualities found in the early poem. In it, the narrator describes his first voyage as a ship's mate, a voyage that seemed "ordered for the illustration of life, that might stand for a symbol of existence." Speaking of the old cargo boat he says, "To me she was not an old rattle-trap carting about the world a lot of coal for freight--to me she was the endeavour, the test, the trial of life."

Since our object this year is to expose the students to a great variety of literary works both old and new in the hopes of developing some taste for good literature, it is not our intention to make an exhaustive study of any one work. The questions will be directed towards an awareness of the themes that recur again and again in every age, and the questions that men raise concerning the the meaning of their existence.

While each generation may find different answers, none seems to be final, for the same questions continue to be explored again and again.

At the same time, the student will be asked to give consideration to aesthetic judgment that he may weigh one work against another, and in the process develop his own powers of discernment, and re-evaluate his own standards of worthwhile and enjoyable reading.

In most cases, questions in this unit will be broader, more general, than those in previous years. Student questions here should serve as a springboard for reactions to the total work of art, and whatever seems most interesting or significant about a work. The twelfth grade student should have, by now, acquired some ability in close reading, in studying the various parts and techniques of literature, and should not need questions which lead him through a step by step analysis of a work. However, a variety of possible questions will be suggested for the teacher, who may decide in what way and how thoroughly he will approach any one work.

Youth, for example, poses various interesting questions. The entire narrative is a story told by Marlow to a group of settled and established men drinking claret around a mahogany table. It is set forth in the traditional manner of a yarn, whether told round a fire or at a party. The story itself comes to life vividly, first-hand, with immediacy, but is punctuated by a recall to the narrator from time to time when he says, "Pass the bottle." Why Conrad provides this narrator, whether the device is effective or not, whether or not the style of the narration is consistent with that of a tale told aloud or recalled, are questions which may lead to the central theme of the story, the magic of adventurous youth, and particularly, here, youth recalled.

Conrad's use of description might be another subject for discussion. It might be suggested that the students themselves try to write, briefly, something about their feelings about the sea. The difficulty in saying something fresh and interesting alone might lead them to appreciate the way in which Conrad describes a storm, or the smells of the seaport. Both in Youth and "The Seafarer" the experience of the sea is made into something which is felt, physically, specifically, individually. Marlow says, "The sea was white like a sheet of foam, like a caldron of boiling milk." He tells how "The long-boat changed, as if by magic, into matchwood where she stood in her gripes. I had lashed her myself, and was rather proud of myhandiwork, which had withstood so long the malice of the sea." A particularly effective example of description is that of the ship with its burning cargo, "enveloped in languid and unclean vapours," drifting across a sea which "was polished, was blue, was pellucid, was sparkling like a precious stone." The hellish scene of the sailors shoveling ballast in the depths of the ship, or that scene in which Marlow, youthfully impatient, goes back to see why the men are not leaving the burning ship and finds them drinking and eating in the light of the fire with their captain asleep on the deck are both good examples of Conrad's use of description. Description in a great work is never merely pictorial or arbitrary rendering of a scene. As in Youth or "The Seafarer," description may be used to reflect the temper of the setting, or to reflect or contrast with the feelings of characters. A study of the use of description may also lead to thematic considerations. The sea may be described as a force to be dealt with, as something wilful and contrary. Conrad invests many of his scenes, even of what might have been the most common sort of labor, with a sense of strangeness, of being larger than life.

Following are some suggested questions which may serve as a beginning for discussion of the two works.

"The Seafarer"

1. Why is the youth so eager to go to the sea? The old man is quite specific about the hardships that must be endured. How does this affect the youth?

2. How does life on land appear to the old sailor? Is his view any more realistic than the youth's idea of life at sea? Why does the grass always look greener on the other side of the fence?

3. Could this poem be interpreted as an old sailor remembering his youth and comparing the reality of life at sea with the romantic dreams he once entertained? If so, has he learned from the experience, or is he still a romantic character?

4. What is the mood of the poem? Does the old sailor regret having spent his life at sea, or is he proud of his strength that has withstood many hardships? Give reasons for your answer.

5. The poem is written as a dialogue. Does this make it dramatic? How would you describe the poem? Illustrate your answer from the poem itself.

6. What are the outstanding features of the form of the poem? How do these features contribute to the effect the work has on the reader?

YOUTH

1. Experience alone is meaningless. It is the interpretation of experience that gives meaning to life. What did his experience at sea mean to Conrad's narrator in Youth?

2. How did Conrad's narrator differ from the old sailor in "The Seafarer" in his attitude to the sea? How can you explain the difference?

3. "Youth and the sea. Glamour and the sea! The good, strong sea, the salt, bitter sea, that could whisper to you and roar at you and knock your breath out of you. . . By all that's wonderful it is the sea, I believe, the sea itself--or is it youth alone?" How has Conrad answered this question in Youth?

4. The narrator in Youth asserts that time is "more cruel, more pitiless, more bitter than the sea." Discuss this idea with reference to both "The Seafarer" and Youth.

5. "Between the five of us there was the strong bond of the sea, and also the fellowship of the craft, which no amount of enthusiasm for yachting, cruising, and so on can give, since one is only the amusement of life and the other is life itself."

   What are the experiences that bind men together? Do you agree with Conrad that the deepest bonds are forged by sharing serious pursuits rather than by amusements shared?

6. The detailed descriptions of the events of the voyage along with the reflections of the mature man looking back, and the remembered thoughts of the young sailor are skillfully intertwined to shape Conrad's story. Discuss the balance of realism and romance, the epic features and the lyric qualities of the story, and compare this treatment with the poet's treatment of the same theme in "The Seafarer."

"Fern Hill"

by Dylan Thomas

"Fern Hill" is not a difficult poem to understand. Because it appeals to the common nostalgia we all feel remembering carefree childhood, most readers will at once respond to the sense of the poem. The sense of play, of the out of doors, of the freshness of trees, water, flowers, are all familiar. Whether it is a farm, or simply a yard with an apple tree, or a park, which is recalled,one may well recall the sense of being at home, "prince of the apple towns," in a world that seemed all there was to know.

And yet, as with any common theme, the writer must make something more of it, something individual, fresh enough so that it not only appeals to our common feelings but makes them new again, improves upon them perhaps. Dylan Thomas captures not only the sweetness of the memory, but the poignancy as well. His images are consistently clean, pure, like water and grass. White, blue, and particularly green and golden are the colors of the poem. Thomas uses colors not only as visual images, but to reflect a mood and meaning as well. "Happy as the grass was green" fuses the mood of the speaker with his surroundings. "Golden in the heydays of his eyes" renders him not only in warm sunlight, to our eyes, but also as something precious, almost more than real. "Green and carefree," and "green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman," "Golden in the mercy of his means," all continue the elevation of the figure of the child to something intensified, precious, at one with grass and sunlight. Even fire, in the third stanza, is not something consuming but also green, full of life.

Thomas often uses this way of jolting words out of their ordinary usage by coupling them with strange adjectives or using them in unaccustomed ways. The horses walk "Out of the whinnying green stable" not only strikes us for its originality but manages to compress whinnying horse, green grass, the stable from which the horses go to pasture, and all the associations these words might have, into one heightened and succinct statement. Perhaps students might mark all the word combinations or phrasings that seem odd, or obscure, and then try to decide why Thomas has used them as he does. For example, in the first stanza he says, "once below a time." This has echoes of the beginning of a child's story, once upon a time. But what does it mean exactly? Is he saying that he, "prince of the apple towns," was subject to time, or that, to the contrary, he was not yet conscious of time, or both--or something else? And how does one interpret "singing as the farm was home?" Is this like "happy as the grass was green," or does it mean, singing because the farm was home?

"The sun that is young once only," of course does not mean that the sun itself is young but that to a child, who "is young once only," it has a different quality in his youth than it does later. Ask the students whether or not they can accept the idea that "the calves / Sang to my horn." Ask them what is happening, what associations are evoked in the words, "the foxes. . . barked clear and cold." And how many associations are compressed into one strangely unified image in ". . . the sabbath rang slowly/ In the pebbles of the holy streams." For the child, everything becomes part of one harmonious experience, in which the sounds of foxes barking, of church bells ringing, are as pure and liquid as the sound of clear water over rocks, and all seem to be suffused in a sense of holiness, that is not much a matter of specific religion as of a sense of perfection.

Stanza three continues the images of grass and water, but here are the strange images of flying movement into sleep. Even sleep, in childhood, is more than exhaustion and oblivion. On his imagination he rides into sleep, and the hooting owls seem to be "bearing the farm away." Why does Thomas say "All the sun long," and "All the moon long" in this stanza, instead of all day or all night long? Is he simply trying for novelty, breaking the words out of their accustomed uses to get attention, to freshen old words and ideas, or does there seem to be a specific purpose to what he does? Sometimes one can see a distinct reason for a peculiar usage, and at other times can only say that there seems to be a reason, or that there might have been any number of reasons in the poet's mind, but the effect on the reader seems to be so. In short, it is probably not advisable to insist on one rigid interpretation for all of the unusual images in this poem, but the student should be able to see how they generally contribute to a sense of wonder, lyrical excitement, to a landscape which is pure and fresh as it is old and familiar.

The last stanza deserves particular attention. It has been prepared for in all the preceding references to time which "let me hail and climb," "let me play and be," and "allows/In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs/Before the children green and golden/Follow him out of grace." To the child, unconscious of time passing, time is a free master. He does not realize that even as a child he is aging, "green and dying." The poet says that from birth, man is dying. Conscious of mortality he looks back on his childhood not as a time when he was free of time, but unaware of it, and "I sang in my chains like the sea."

Emphasis here should be on the content of the poem, but students should also be aware of Thomas' use of stanzaic form, how he constructs parallel forms, repeats the length of corresponding lines which reflect the parallel progression of ideas and images. He makes use of the long lines to give a sense of breathless excitement, of images piled one onto the other and words which pour out with a sense of ecstasy.

Considering all the works included in this group, the student should be able to see how each one plays a variation on a similar theme, that of youth and age. But a statement of this theme clearly does not account for the uniqueness of each selection. How writers make something new and individual out of old ideas is as important in the judgment of literature as the discernment of universals. Students might try to write a simple remniscence about something in their own lives. A high school senior could hardly be expected to look back on his childhood with the experience of great age, but he might feel that way. How could he write about another time, or place, in such a way to make it significant to someone else and at the same time unique to him? How do the writers in this part do this? Specific description of places or events is only part of the answer. The writer also ascribes some meaning to those places or events.

Part Two: The Nativity, Christian Tradition

"The Second Shepherd's Play"

from the

Wakefield Mystery Cycle

"The Second Shepherd's Play"was one of a cycle of medieval plays, generally performed out of doors, to popular crowds, on a moveable stage or sort of wagon. These "mystery plays" were generally based on the Bible, both Old and New Testament. As we see in this play, the story of the nativity is enhanced and popularized by the addition of a story about the Shepherds who came to see the Christchild.

The effect of such addition was to render, in characters which seem as ageless as they are medieval or biblical, a play which was both instructional and entertaining.

We may consider that this combination of purposes is partly responsible for the common, realistic, and sometimes apparently naive rendition of action and character. Comedy, the banter and roughhouse of characters, the farcical deception attempted by Mak and his wife are bound to appeal to a popular audience. And yet, in its conception, its structure, its subtle wedding of elements both religious and secular, the play is not at all naive.

When once they perceive that the play makes a parallel between the birth of Christ and the deception in which the sheep is passed off as a newborn child, students may be at first startled, a little puzzled at the author's intentions. Moreover, we know that the first part of the play is comedy. How then does the obvious reverence of the last two scenes fit in with the preceding ones? Some students may feel that the juxtaposition offends taste, for the comedy of the play is certainly earthy. Students must clearly understand the intentions of the author, so far as they are evident in the material, not to read the play as something which uses a Biblical story as an excuse for a vulgar comedy, or, on the other hand, a fine and amusing story except for the bit of religion tacked on at the end.

One reason for the juxtaposition of comic and didactic elements has already been mentioned: the crowds who watched these plays wanted to be entertained as well as instructed, and we all know that instruction is easier to swallow if it's pleasant.

More than this, the play provides many examples of psychological realism. These characters are not mere wooden pawns, moved about to illustrate something. They are very human, and so, full of faults as well as virtues. Mak is a thief, but we do not side against him. His bravado attracts us, and he amuses us. When we first see him he is attempting to pass himself off to the shepherds as "a yeoman of the King." Of course they see through his ridiculous disguise, and with fair humor beat on him. With equally fair humor he adapts himself to their mood by saying, "You're all good fellows." They exchange words about Mak's reputation as a sheep-stealer, and about his wife.

At the beginning of the play each of the shepherds sets forth a complaint about something. The first one grumbles about the cold, poverty, taxes, the rich. The second complains of the cold, marriage, and women in general. The third comes in complaining of the weather and hunger. Similarly, Mak complains that he has too little to eat, a lazy ale-drinking wife, and too many children. To each his troubles are unique, and yet they are the same sort of thing men have grumbled about for centuries. To each one the cold wind seems to be aimed at him alone. Certainly the audience would have identified with these characters, laughed knowingly or jostled their wives' elbows when Mak said, "She drinks ale, too. /Come good or ill, that she will always do. /She eats fast as she can, / And each year gives a man/A babe or two to scan." These are humble, poor men, realistic, earthy, convincing. But in this play their characteristics are not set forth for amusement or realistic effect only.

These are the men Christ came to redeem, men with a great many faults, though none of them so bad that the characters are unsympathetic. The Nativity is the story of God come to earth, in weakness and poverty, to redeem men. The audience who watched"The Second Shepherd's Play" would, no doubt, have identified with Mak and the shepherds, would have felt that they were no better or worse than they themselves. This would have brought home the message at the end of the play. This child, Christ, is no remote and awesome God; He is one that shepherds may approach.

Another parallel is made in the shepherds' treatment of Mak. Though he and his wife feared he would hang if caught, the shepherds exact no such severe punishment. Though one shepherd says, "let's leave them dead," they decide instead to toss Mak in a blanket, a minor roughing-up compared to what they might have done. This strikes the theme of forgiveness. Even the shepherd who had suggested killing Mak says, at the end, "We'd best forget what's been." This of course sounds the theme of redemption; as they can forgive so can they be forgiven.

Whether or not the farce of the sheep is artistically harmonious with the rest of the play is more difficult to say. We enjoy it, certainly. The important thing may be that there seems to be no harm in it, that it is in keeping with the nature of the characters to turn the idea of a birth into something as grotesquely funny as this. Mak determinedly tries to maintain the lie as long as he can, even while the shepherds are calling him liar. Perhaps two functions are performed by this scene. The theme of birth is introduced, even if it is a vulgar, mock-birth. Moreover, this is no doubt the most humorous part of the play. The audience would be roaring by the time Mak says, "I tell you, sirs, his nose in truth was broken." Then, like the shepherds in Scene VII, the audience would be worn out with boisterousness. Perhaps they would have used up all their desire to be amused. They would feel they had had a good joke and a good entertainment. Then, the scene of the nativity is set. After the farce one is willing enough to settle for a mood of repose, for something elevated to give meaning to it all. The play does not turn serious all at once. Scene VII, though relatively free of comic elements, still has the shepherds singing off tune, trying to imitate the angels. It is as much as saying that man, try as he may, can't be perfect; perhaps it is enough that the shepherds have good intentions. This scene lets down the tension of the comedy gradually, so that in the next, last scene we are prepared for the mood of reverent worship. The shepherds who offer gifts of cherries, a bird, a ball, do so with humble yet graceful speech. They go out joyfully to spread the news.

"Journey of the Magi"

by T.S. Eliot

Like "The Second Shepherd's Play," "The Journey of the Magi" takes traditional characters from the story of the Nativity and imagines something more than is known about them traditionally. Here it is one of the wise men who speaks, but he is now looking back at the experience. "All this was a long time ago, I remember." And he is also looking back at the change which was made on his life.

The man himself seems bemused about the exact nature of this change. He questions the meaning of the experience. "Were we led all that way for/Birth or Death?" This very questioning, the tenuous quality of the experience remembered, is part of the statement of the poem. For by his questioning the old man conveys the mood of being "no longer at ease here." He is not satisfied with simply returning, to his old life.

Also like"The Second Shepherd's Play," Eliot's poem brings a convincing realism to the material by the use of common, human details. It was clearly not a comfortable journey, nothing like the serene passage on camels across a comfortable desert depicted on greeting cards. Nor were the Magi absolutely firm in their purpose. "There were times we regretted/The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces, /And the silken girls bringing sherbet." They had to contend with rough camel men, dirt, overpriced lodging, and a nagging doubt about the sense of their venture.

When they arrive at the "temperate valley" it is like an oasis, "but there was no information." The image of "Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver," seems to combine more than one reference. The "pieces of silver" of course foreshadow the betrayal of Christ by Judas, which is entailed by the birth itself, for, as the wise man says, death was inherent in this birth, from the beginning. Also suggested in the image might be the gambling for Christ's robe at the crucifixion. In short, the image is symbolic of Christ's betrayal to death. Other symbolism may be found in this passage, for example the three trees, suggesting the crucifixion. What is essential is to realize that Eliot, in the images of the poem, demonstrates the problem the old wise man questions, the perplexing way in which death was a part of the birth, from the beginning.

For the wise man the problem centers on this question. The Birth was that of Christ, but it was also the human Death of Christ. It was a birth for the Magi, a birth into new life, but it was also "Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death," for it was the death of their old lives. "I would do it again" he says, although "A hard time we had of it." The difficulty was not only in the physical journey itself, but in the journey into a new life. The paradox of death-life is continued in the final line, "I should be glad of another death." For such a death would be a release from "an alien people clutching their gods," and, itself, in a Christian context, a rebirth into new life.

"The Second Coming"

by William Butler Yeats

One difficulty in teaching the poetry of Yeats to high school students, or to anyone, for that matter, is that Yeats made extensive use not only of Irish folklore, Greek and Roman mythology, and assorted mythological and referential material from a great range of sources, but also of his own private mythology, a rather mystical and esoteric conception of history and the universe. However, "The Second Coming," more than some of Yeats' poems, even while it reflects Yeats' conception of history as a cyclical matter, of widening and narrowing revolutions of things or events, can be understood without a great deal of background material.

The first image of the poem, the circling falcon which has travelled beyond the control of the falconer's voice, establishes the notion of history as gyre-like movement, of the time as movement outward, away from a still center, beyond control and into anarchy. "Things fall apart" may seem pretty vague, but the words somehow have the right connotation. They mean everything is falling apart, order, existence, physical pattern. They express also the sort of obscurely perceived horror which is part of the "rough beast" in the second stanza. All the images of the first stanza are of disorder which grows continually. "The blood-dimmed tide" which is loosed is also "Mere anarchy" which is loosed upon the world. It is not only innocence which is drowned by anarchy, but "The ceremony of innocence," that is, the saving order of it, as in religious ceremony, or the pious or dutiful behavior of innocents. "The best" who would represent the old order "lack all conviction" and "the worst" or the disruptive, anarchical elements, are on the rise, "full of passionate intensity." If you will ask the students simply what sort of concrete situations are suggested in this first stanza, perhaps it will help them to see how the images add up to a picture of chaos that might be political, historical, social, or even natural. One might apply the passage equally well to floods, earthquakes, revolutions; to times of wars or simply to times when the world seems to be changing at a great rate, when things seem to be out of control. A great part of the strength and success of this poem depends on this very ambiguity, on the connotation of words and images which might apply so exactly, it seems, to a great number of familiar situations, and yet which can't be pinned to any specific, historical, social, or political condition. We are reminded of people crying, the world is coming to an end, or, there are dark days ahead, or, times are changing, or, there's going to be a war, or, simply, I don't like the looks of this. The images of falcon and "blood-dimmed tide" are both specific and universal.

The second stanza is more specific. It is here that students may be somewhat confused by Yeats' use of references to the birth of Christ coupled with the sphinx-like beast which "Slouches towards Bethlehem." Yeats, in his own personal mythology, say history divided into periods, the beginnings of which were marked by some event, or birth. One such birth was that of Helen of Troy, its consequences being the Trojan war and all the attendant fighting, death, adventuring, of the Greeks. Another such birth was that of Christ and the following Christian era. What he says in this poem is that another two thousand year cycle is coming to an end and we await the birth of a new era, this time one tinged with horror and violence as was that which followed Helen.

"The Second Coming" refers of course to the second coming of Christ, a time itself which is supposed to be marked by turmoil, a final upheaval and accounting at the end of the Christian era. But Yeats does not use the reference in this way exactly. He sees signs that one era is coming to an end, but that another is beginning, hence the "vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*." He also says that the character of a coming era is revealed somehow in the preceding one, so that "twenty centuries of stony sleep/Were vexed to nightmare" and the "rough beast" "Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born." The circling birds of this stanza recall the "Turning and turning in the widening gyre" of the falcon in the first stanza, and tie both images to the idea of history as cyclical movement. It is important to remember that the speaker does not see the beast, but only an image, or vision of it, as it might be, in the future, and so the poem ends not with a statement but with a question, which really asks, what is the nature of the coming times?

Student discussion of the poem should not turn into a sort of debate, in which students might say, I do or do not think Yeats is right because. . . . They should see, instead, how Yeats has used both Christian tradition and his own ideas and images to give a poem which presents mood and idea of historical change, of man's own tendency to see signs or omens in things, to fear change and read patterns, good or ill, into events. The image of the beast, in the second stanza, is a finely wrought embodiment of dumb horror. It is sphinx-like, hence ageless. It "slouches" and moves "its slow thighs," a vision of slow and yet inexorable horror. It is indifferent and yet it can't be stopped, for it has "A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun

There are some events which seem, to men, to change their lives and history unalterably. The nativity of Christ was one such event. In each of the selections of this group this idea is dealt with differently and with different emphasis. This would be a good basis for comparison of the three selections. How has each writer interpreted the change brought about by the Nativity? How has he reflected it in his material? What particular character of the Nativity is emphasized in each selection? In "The Second Shepherd's Play" we have variations on the theme of redemptior and forgiveness, both in the episode of Mak and in the shepherds' joyful visit to the stable. In Eliot's poem, the theme is given a personal tone. The old man reflects on his own life and how nothing has been the same since he made the trip to Bethlehem. He is made to stand for all mankind who has been touched by the birth of Christ. This poem might be compared, to an extent, with the Yeats poem; in one is the idea that death is implicit in birth, and in the other the idea that even within one era is contained the intimation of the next.

Part Three: Conflict of Generations

The theme of this part is related to that of part one but is not the same thing. In the selections in part one we see that man views his life differently in age than in youth, or that youth and age see things differently, that the fact that man ages; that he grows in experience while he may, at the same time, lose some of the freshness of experience, his youthful idealism and unhesitating seizing of life, are all ideas found to a certain extent in the first selections.

So too do youth and age differ in the selections of part three, but here the emphasis is on the conflict which arises between fathers and sons rather than the wisdom, or poignancy, which arises from man's knowledge of his transient condition.

Conflicts between children and parents can be strong material for literature, for the emotions arising from such conflicts can be both strong and painful. If it is natural for children and parents to love one another, it is also natural that they must lead their own lives and that these do not always suit mutual interests. The father, accustomed to thinking of his son as a child, may resent the son's striving toward individual independence The son, accustomed to viewing his father as a superior being, may react more harshly to the discovery that his father is a fallible human being than he would to similar faults in others. The dichotomy of love and hate, the individual will to self-assertion and survival, the conflict between the ego and the identification with the family group, are all strong elements of the theme.

In the story of David and Absalom we feel the strength of the tragic lament of David for his dead son, and yet realize the inevitable destructive result. In "Soldier's Home" we sympathize with Krebs, and feel that he must get out, escape the suffocating atmosphere of his family. And yet we know he will do so to the hurt and bewilderment of his parents. Along with Chris, in "All My Sons," we are drawn to the character of the father. He is a warm, sympathetic character, and we hesitate to think of him as a criminal. Like Chris, we wish to think that things are otherwise, but must face up to the fact that the man has entangled himself in his own trap, has betrayed his own sons as well as his country. The Chinese poem, "Putting the Blame on His Sons," reflects a father's bewilderment with the way his children have turned out. Each father has great expectations for his children. When they do not live up to what he expects it is hard for him to acknowledge both that they are the products of his own influence and yet individuals with their own preferences as well.

"Soldier's Home"

by Ernest Hemingway

In"Soldier's Home, Hemingway says of a picture of Krebs with "two German girls and another corporal, "The Rhine does not show in the picture." Similarly the war does not show in the picture in this story, but it is there in its influence on Krebs. He has been touched, changed by it, and he cannot go back to being what he was before it.

It is a cliché to say that the army makes men out of boys, and this idea alone is not enough to make a good story, although the idea is inherent in this material. Hemingway uses the idea of war here to illustrate something which might have been told with other circumstances, which has been, in fact: that one may leave home as a child, undergo experience in the world, and find it impossible to return to his former situation.

Returning home, Krebs remembers "the times so long back when he had done the one thing, the only thing for a man to do, easily and naturally, when he might have done something else." Krebs' mother knows that he has grown up. Before the war he was not allowed to use the family car, but now she persuades her husband that Krebs should have the car in the evenings. But this is only token recognition. She still admonishes him not to "muss up the paper" before his father had read it.

To this story about a boy who returns from the war to find he has outgrown his childhood environment and habits, Hemingway adds certain important ideas. He reiterates the contrast between the simplicity of action in war, and the complexity at home. Krebs does not feel that it is worth the trouble to approach the girls in his hometown. They would want to talk, and it would be complicated. With the French and German girls, "It was simple and you were friends." Krebs is repulsed by his mother's concern for him. She wants to tie him with religious bonds, with maternal love, and with feelings of obligation and guilt. His father wants to involve him in his business. Krebs plans to go away because "He wanted his life to go smoothly. It had just gotten going that way."

At the end of the story he chooses to go watch "his best sister" play baseball. Like baseball or any other sport, the war seems to have been a kind of sport for Krebs, not in a frivolous sense, but because it had rules. One knew which side one was on, and what he had to do. The actions and values of war, for Krebs, were uncomplicated by human emotional entanglements.

When Krebs was in the army he acted naturally, as a man had to. When he returned home he found himself daught in the sticky complexity of family relationships, obligations to religion, to finding a job and becoming something, to looking for a wife, and yet at the same time he was thrust back into the position of being a child in a family. Changed as he was by experience, he could not go back to this.

Hemingway makes it clear that Krebs is not a rebel. He does not want to leave home because he wants to break out of order, or to turn his life upside down. On the contrary, he is a man who likes order, is accustomed to it. Before the war he is shown in a fraternity picture "wearing exactly the same height and style collar" as his fraternity brothers. And he does not dislike the girls of his hometown. He likes the way they look, their uniform style, with round collars and bobbed hair. "He liked the pattern. It was exciting." And "He loved to play pool." Like the war, and like his sister's baseball game, pool represents a type of action of precision, skill, uncluttered by human complexity.

Another thing which is repeated is that Krebs is forced to tell lies when he goes home. He must lie about his war experiences because people do not want to hear the reality. The people of his hometown expect certain things in his stories, so he is obliged to give them what they expect or nothing at all. He would have to tell lies if he became involved in courtship with the hometown girls. His mother forces him into a lie about his feelings for her, and about religion. We sense that Krebs felt his actions in the war were honest, just as they were simple. Clearly Hemingway equates honest, simple action with manhood. To return to his hometown and family position would be, to Krebs, a dishonest and complicated act, a betrayal of his newfound manhood.

Hemingway tells a great deal about Krebs, about the war, about the people of Krebs' hometown, his family, about the life he knew in general, in a very short story. The economy of the story is gained partly in the manner of telling, in straightforward, unadorned language. It is also a result of the structure of the story. The first half is all told, by the omniscient narrator, who crosses large amounts of space and time in a few words, and sets forth the whole situation. This first half is supported and illustrated, in a sense repeated, in the single scene which makes up the second half of the story. This scene corresponds roughly in time to the time it takes to read it. Dialogue is the primary vehicle. In the conversation of Krebs, his sister, and his mother, we see acted out the premises of the first half of the story, and this final scene gives force and reason to Krebs' final decision to leave home.

Krebs is not a particularly attractive character. He seems rather cold, uninteresting, certainly not charming in any way. And yet we sympathize with him because it is so obviously impossible for him to return to live in his parents' home. Hemingway is not casting son and parents in roles of hero and villains. Clearly the parents cannot help themselves any more than Krebs can change himself into something to suit them. He is not even suggesting that Krebs and his parents ought to compromise, try to understand each other and work things out. He is simply saying that this is the way things are, that the son must become a man and find his own life. Krebs "would go to Kansas City and get a job" and his mother "would feel all right about it." Because essentially, Hemingway seems to be saying, this break is the right thing. But it is the painful moment of the break which he portrays here.

(For text, see "Putting the Blame on His Sons" by T'ao Ch'ien from Anthology of Chinese Literature: From early times to the fourteenth century; ed. Cyril Birch; Grove Press, Inc., New York, 1965; p. 187)

In the Hemingway story, Krebs' mother felt she had some right to make claims on him, for she loved him, had worried about him, prayed for him. And yet parents do not own even their children. In this poem, too, the father seems to feel that he has some claim on his sons. "In spite of all I could do" he says, they did not turn out to be what he hoped for. Each one is like himself, and not like his father.

From what the father says, we learn as much about him as about his sons. We can assume that he does care for "brush and paper," that he does not consider himself lazy, and that he loves the arts. In other words, he wanted his sons to be like him, and to care for the things he cares for. We wonder if he is not expecting too much from his sons. He tells us that he is old and they are young. Perhaps when they are old they will feel the same way about their own sons, but now, when they are sixteen, thirteen, and nine, it seems to him that their characters are formed, and not to his liking.

The father says, "If such was Heaven's decree," because he cannot imagine that his own influence would have produced sons like his. We can imagine him, at the end of the poem, throwing off all responsibility for his sons, tossing up his hands in resignation, and saying he might as well just die, because he doesn't seem to be able to do anything with them.

The poem begins with the man's statement of his age. To have five sons would seem to be a good thing, but "Not one cares for brush and paper," that is, the tools of art and learning. The father speaks with some irony. Speaking of his sixteen year old son, he says he has no equal, in laziness that is. The father cannot even be satisfied with the son who has tried to please him, because it is not really the boy's nature to "love the arts." And perhaps he exaggerates the ignorance of his thirteen year old sons for effect. The youngest son is apparently a lover of the out of doors rather than the schoolroom, but again we expect that the father may be exaggerating. The poem might be read as a serious lament of a father for his sons' deficiencies, but at the same time the hyperbolic statements of what the sons are like, or what they do, suggest that the author may intend for the reader to see the father as one who is making more fuss than is warranted. We may feel that he is asking too much to expect young boys to behave like an old man. Consequently we feel that he is also exaggerating his request for "the thing within the cup," presumably poison, or death.

The use of names, of specific ages and occupations, all contribute, in this short poem, to a rather complete picture of the man, his family, and their lives. Students should have little difficulty in seeing how the poem, although more than a thousand years old, recalls characters, situations, feelings, familiar enough today.

In "Soldier's Home" the point of view was primarily that of Krebs, though one might imagine the mother, like the father in this poem, saying, "In spite of all that I could do--you want to go away without a care for what we expect of you." One might also imagine in this poem, spoken from the father's point of view, how one of the sons might feel the necessity of finding his own life, apart from what his father has planned.

"David and Absalom"
(Absalom's Revolt)

The story of David and Absalom relates the revolt of son against father. But it is also the story of brother turned against brother, of civil conflict, and a story of statesmanship, civil duty, and kingship.

Significantly it begins with a story of violation. Tamar tells her half-brother, "Now therefore, I pray thee, speak unto the king; for he will not withhold me from thee." But Ammon pursues his violation of law and morality, and incurs the lasting wrath of Absalom, brother of Tamar, and Ammon's own half-brother.

Absalom's revenge itself, though instigated by an actual wrong against his branch of David's family, offends not only the bonds of family but those of host and guest. Treacherously he invites all the king's sons to his house, and when Ammon "is merry with wine" commands his servants to kill him. Having so offended his father's house, Absalom goes to the house of his mother's people.

The king, David, seems unable to take a decisive course of action. He has Absalom brought home, but does not meet with him. Absalom shows that he is offended by this lack of recognition. "Now therefore let me see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me." These words, spoken to Joab whose fields Absalom has had burnt to get attention, are an indication of Absalom's already growing skill in forcing his father into the position which he, Absalom, wants. Believing with good cause that David will not kill him, he leaves the alternative of recognizing and absolving him.

It is at this point we pick up the text, dealing with the revolt proper of Absalom against David. We first observe the guileful way in which Absalom ingratiates himself with his father's subjects. By show of good intentions and affection, "Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." A two-faced plotter, Absalom has gathered strength even while under his father's protection. Absalom gathers followers, but "they went in their simplicity, and they knew not any thing." His father, David, is a different sort of character. When forced to flee, David wants no one to go with him needlessly. He listens neither to slander nor to the cursing of Shimei. To him, the greatest wrong is that which his son does, and beside which nothing else seems significant. "My son. . . seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day." Even when he has been wronged, David is a righteous man.

His words here foreshadow the turn of events when Absalom decides to listen to the false counselor sent by David. "For the Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahitophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom."

Acting the part of father more than king, David cautions his captains not to hurt Absalom in battle. But Absalom is killed and cast into a pit, "and all Israel fled every one to his tent." The wrong Absalom has done is not to his father alone, but to the people and the tribe. They revenge themselves, but fear the wrath of the father rather than the king.

The king cries out, hearing of his son's death, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" And the king's captain, Joab, comes to David and points out that David wrongs them all, "for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well. Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably unto thy servants: for I swear by the Lord, if thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this night: and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befell thee from thy youth until now." Joab makes it clear to the king where his duty lies, and how he has offended the duties of kingship, in regarding the life of his renegade son more highly than those of his faithful followers.

Then David, seeing that he must take control again over his disordered people, demands that he be brought again into his domain. The last episodes, dealing with Shimei, who had cursed against the fleeing king, and Mephibosheth, whose servant had slandered him to David, further define the roles of king and subjects. When Abishai asks whether Shimei should be executed "because he cursed the Lord's anointed," David answers, "shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel? for do not I know that I am this day king over Israel?" The king exists in a paternal relationship to his people, and sees fit to protect and forgive even those who have wronged him. Mephibosheth also acknowledges that David is right because he has divinity on his side and calls him "an angel of God." As certain of his subjects have acted wrongly against David, so has Ziba, servant of Mephibosheth, acted against his master. In telling Mephibosheth to divide his goods with his servant, David is instructing the man to behave as David himself has. Mephibosheth acknowledges David's paternal role, saying that the king has treated him better than he deserves, seating him at his own table. In an act of humility, the man says to let his servant take all his land "forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house." It is no longer a time for revenge but for setting in order, for the resumption of proper places, forgetting old wrongs, and social unity.

The narrative is both terse, economical, and rich in detail and characterization. Events are set down in a highly objective manner, and yet the very objectivity lends itself to hightly wrought emotion, as in David's tragic lament for his lost son. Absalom, the usurper, not only violates filial duty but his duty as a subject as well. Similarly, the subjects, both faithful and rebellious, are seen not only as the king's people but in a relation to him like that of children to father. Always implicit in the narrative is the assumption that these relationships are divinely right, moral because they are willed by God. Absalom was a crafty statesman, but he failed because he opposed the law of God; this interpretation is given to Absalom's listening to the counselor planted by David. When the narrative is seen as an illustration of right kingship, and of the mutual obligations of ruler and ruled, father and son, the diverse incidents, some of them a little puzzling in themselves, become many sides to a complete picture.

"All My Sons"

by Arthur Miller

In "All My Sons," the point of view is not so distinctly that of one person. Because it is a play, all the characters speak, independently and for themselves, at different times. Character, plot, background material, all the necessary information, is revealed through dialogue, except for a minimum of stage direction by the author. The revelation of this information, when and how it is revealed, is central to the success of the play.

Students should be conscious, already, of the restrictions of the dramatic form, but you may want to remind them that a play is intended to be produced, and that the author cannot add interpretation or exposition in appropriate places in the same way he can, for example, in a short story. In a realistic play, such as this one, he must deal with the problem of getting all necessary information, even out of the distant past, into the present speech and actions of his players, and he must do this in a way which is convincing and natural.

For example, the central problem of the play is the question of Joe's guilt, but this is not revealed at once. In the first hint of this, in fact, we see Joe as a kind of neighborhood child's hero. He jokes with the boy, Bert, about an imaginary jail in the Keller's basement. This is immediately followed by talk, between Keller and his son, Chris, about Larry's tree, and about Kate's waiting for him to come back. Then they argue about Chris' inviting Ann to come back, and his intention of asking her to marry him. "You marry that girl and you're pronouncing him dead," says Keller. In this way the germs of the plot have been planted. That Keller turns the idea of his having been in jail into a joke is representative of the way he tries to make believe about his crime. At the same time, when he pretends to have a jail in his basement, he is really saying that the reality of his crime and the necessity for his punishment are still with him, though he wants to turn it into make-believe. That the tree falls, which is later interpreted by the mother as a sign that Larry is not dead, really means that the issue of Larry, of all the sons who died in the war, and of the ones who died because of Keller's deception, is not yet dead but is about to erupt anew. Perhaps Keller already sees what he does not wish to see, that Ann's coming will set off the chain of confrontations that will force him to face and accept his guilt. We must recognize the various meanings that can be given to the return of the lost son, for in a sense he both returns and is killed within the play. Chris, who believes in his father's innocence, flatly denies the possibility of Larry's returning. He does not foresee the unearthing of old guilt which is about to take place; he thinks the issue is settled, dead as his brother. The mother, who knows her husband's guilt, wants to believe it is not so; consequently she insists that Larry is not dead. To her, it seems that if her son did not die, then neither did the others die, in the defective airplanes, and then her husband did not commit his crime. As she says, near the end of act two, to Chris, "Your brother's alive, darling, because if he's dead, your father killed him. Do you understand me now?" Ann, who has Larry's last letter, knows that the son is dead, because of the family disgrace, but she thinks it was a mistake, that only her own father was guilty. Ann and Kate share the two halves of the information which would make the picture complete, but each denies the other half until the final crisis.

All these things are suggested early in the play, in references to the jail, the tree, and Ann, but their meaning does not become clear to us all at once.

The reader's, or viewer's, perception of circumstance most closely parallels that of Chris. Of all the central characters in the play, Chris is most oblivious to the true state of things. It is appropriate and natural therefore that he should be the one to start up again the destructive chain of events by inviting Ann back. Only in his reluctance to have his name attached to the family business does he show any uneasiness about the way his father made his money, but if he had been conscious of the truth he would not have plunged so innocently and freely into the initiating action.

Chris tells his father, in act one, "I've been a good son too long, a good sucker. I'm through with it." These are strong words, but he does not fully realize what he is saying. He means to say that he intends to make his own life, to marry whom he pleases, work at what he wants, to be himself without the shadow of family business and obligations hanging over him. Ironically, his petulant statement turns out to be quite exact. Unhappily for him, he will no longer be "a sucker." Emboldened by his own voice, he tells his father, "I'm a pretty tough guy." And the father, with paternal irony replies, "Yeah. I can see that."

Chris serves the role of the innocent speaking the truth, more than he knows, in other situations too. To his mother he says, "We're like at a railroad station waiting for a train that never comes in." He is speaking of the wait for his dead brother, but more than this he speaks of the family fate, the fate of his father, which has been held in abeyance, but only for a time.

To itemize all the information which is revealed to us gradually, bit by bit, would be to write out most of the play, for none of the characters, and none of the problems or events are given to us all at once. But students should note the progressive unfolding of certain key information, and how it is handled.

It is appropriate that we hear of Joe's being in jail first as a king of joke, because this is the way he views it, or tries to, and this is what Chris would like to think of it; this also creates the character of Joe first as a sympathetic one, a joker, a man fond of children, easy-going and pleasant. It is necessary that we like Joe, whatever he has done, for us to care, in the end, what happens to him.

Later, the mother's irritated reaction to this joke tells us that it is more than a joke, something she would like not to be reminded of. When Ann arrives, we learn that her father is in jail, and gradually perceive some sort of connection though it is not yet actually clear.

Ann recalls the neighborhood woman who shouted "Murderers!" But it is left to Joe Keller to recall the more complete picture of what happened. He tells of his return from jail, after Kate has said "They still remember about Dad. It's different with him--he was exonerated, your father's still there." Joe says, specifically, "I was the beast; the guy who sold cracked cylinder heads to the Army Air Force; the guy who made twenty-one P-40's crash in Australia." But, he explains, after his exoneration, he came back to the town, and "Fourteen months later I had one of the best shops in the state again, a respected man again; bigger than ever."

This information is not given until this point because, realistically, there has been no reason, so far in the play, to give it. We can assume that everyone except Ann knows about the actual reaction of the town when Keller returned. He is telling it for her, telling her that her own father ought to come back to the town. But it is also necessary, at this point, for the reader to have a more complete picture of circumstances. For, with Ann's arrival, events gather speed toward the final destruction. What has preceded has been primarily the establishment of character, of setting, of background, and hints, only, of foreboding.

At this point, for all we know, this is the true picture, Like Chris, we may believe that Joe was an innocent man punished unjustly, who overcame the wrong by his own strength and determination. We may be completely on Joe Keller's side.

From this point on, however, the more complete picture is revealed. Sometimes it is a matter only of hints, and sometimes it is with the conviction of statement. The scene of proposal between Ann and Chris is troubled slightly by the though of Joe's war money. When Ann's brother, George, calls, we know that trouble is coming, though the exact nature of it is unclear. More definitely troubling is Kate's admonition to Joe, at the end of act one, to "Be smart." She is not easy. She does not tell Joe to be honest, or not to worry. She knows that he has to worry, and she is afraid that he is not equal to the attack.

At the beginning of act two, Chris has just completed the symbolic act of removing the debris of the fallen tree. "You notice there's more light with that thing gone?" says Kate. In a sense, and momentarily, she acknowledges that the pretense has been put aside, that things will come out into the open.

Gradually we learn that Steve has not given up accusing Joe, that there is another possible side to the story than Joe has told us. We begin to doubt Keller's innocence. But it is too soon to name him guilty, so easily. Just as George has put doubt into everyone's mind, including the reader's, it is Keller who enters and proves equal to the task of convincing George, and the others, that Steve was capable, even apt, to commit such a crime and then to try to blame someone else. Keller cites other examples of Steve's weakness; a fire from a heater left on, and money lost in bad investments. It is important that this comes from Keller himself. For he is not an educated man; he does not seem to be particularly intelligent, and it is hard to tell, from what we see of him here, whether or not he is particularly shrewd. He has seemed kindly, honest, artless. In this scene, when he convinces George that Steve was in the wrong, he does so with apparent logic and conviction. As Kate has asked, it seems that he is being "smart." But perhaps he is innocent, as he says. It remains for the following action to prove differently. That Joe can convince George, at this point, of Steve's guilt and Joe's innocence, serves to show us how he might, too, have convinced a judge, the town, his family.

It is also important that George leave without doing anything about Joe. In the end, the destruction does not come from any external force, bring Joe to justice. No one reopens the trial. No policemen come to take him away. The destructive force is within Keller himself, and particularly in his relationship with his son, Chris.

The mother has said that Joe was never sick. George picks up on this remark, and takes it as proof that his father is telling the truth. But this is not a detective story. As proof, this is nothing. It is simply further hint of the shaky grounds of doubt on which they all stand.

It is after George has gone that the final confrontation takes place. The Keller family, torn apart by the tension of their doubts, suddenly become, not the apparently happy, wholesome family they seemed at the beginning, but a shouting, fighting group of enemies. Keller calls his wife a maniac for waiting for their dead son. She strikes him. Chris suddenly realizes the connection between his mother's delusion and his father's guilt, and becomes his father's accuser. Faced by his son's knowledge, Keller can no longer maintain his deceptive front. He tries to rationalize his action, to place the blame on his family, that he wanted to make money for them. Chris turns his back on the family and leaves.

It is Keller's insistence that he did what he did for his family that keeps him, momentarily, holding onto his life. In act three, Keller says, "I'm his father and he's my son, and if there's something bigger than that I'll put a bullet in my head!" And he means this. But Kate has already told him, about Chris, "There's something bigger than the family to him." It remains for the revelation of Larry's letter to Ann to drive Joe to face his guilt. But the letter is now shown to Keller first. Ann knows about it, of course; then she convinces Kate of her son's death by showing it to her. Then Chris reads the letter and he delivers it to Keller. In this way they all face up to Keller's guilt before he does himself. It is the son who is the instrument of retribution on the father, both the son who is dead and the one who is living.

Again, it is necessary that Keller deliver his own justice. None of the others would do anything to him. Chris says, "Do I raise the dead when I put him behind bars? . . . The world's that way, how can I take it out on him? What sense does that make? This is a zoo, a zoo!"

After Joe shoots himself, the mother speaks the final words of the play. "Don't dear. Don't take it on yourself. Forget now. Live." She is telling the son to end the chain of guilt and retribution. In part, Chris must feel guilty as the one who gave his father the final information to drive him to his death. Then too, Chris started it all up again by asking Ann back. But the mother knows that Chris was only the instrument of a chain of guilt and retribution which the father himself began. She wants it to be done with; for all guilt to be satisfied and done with in the atonement of her husband's death.

The play is tightly constructed and deserves a close reading. The meaning of many things could be questioned. For example, what role do the minor characters play? What is the connection between the idealist, Dr. Jim Bayliss, and his money-seeking wife, and the plot of the play? Is Bayliss, like Joe, a man who tries to blame the good of his family for his troubles, or was Joe right in saying that Kate wanted more money and was partly responsible for his crime? In part, the Baylisses serve the role of outsiders to reflect the actions and emotions of the central characters. And what of Frank's dabbling in astrology? This is one of the first things mentioned in the play. And at the point where the crisis is impending, Frank enters to say that he has discovered that November 25, the day on which Larry died, was Larry's favorable day. Therefore, according to Frank, Larry couldn't have died then. This may simply mean that things were favorable for Larry, that he should have lived, that his life should have been good, except for his father's crime. It may mean that in a sense Larry has not died, until his family recognizes his death and along with it his father's guilt. The business of Larry's horoscope also underlines the unrealistic attitude of the mother, who persists almost to the end in trying to believe the bad things away.

Something that students should discuss is how Arthur Miller creates a hero, or anti-hero, perhaps, who is both a criminal, a guilty and weak man, and yet sympathetic. We care about Joe Keller. We are not glad of his death, and yet it is dramatically and emotionally correct within the play. There is no way out for him. His own weakness has brought him to this.

The character of Chris undergoes the most dramatic change. At the beginning he is still idealistic, idolizing his father, whom he calls "Joe McGuts." He thinks that he is free, free of the past, of the family, that everything will be right if he just marries Ann and builds his own life. At the end of the play he knows more about the world. The idealistic Chris would have turned a guilty father over to the police. Afterwards, Chris bitterly feels that the world is an imperfect place and there is little point in his trying to change it. We wonder if he is too harsh on his father--expecting too much perfection. Also, there is always some doubt whether or not Chris too guesses at more than he will admit. Why does he not want his name on the family business? And yet he seems completely shocked by the reality. Students might trace all the evidence, one way or the other, of Chris's knowledge or ignorance of the truth, for this may greatly affect our conception of Chris's character. Is he as perfect and honorable as he seems?

These are small, everyday people, in this play. How does the author give them stature and importance? After all, Joe has made some money in the war, but he is still just a common sort of man, uneducated, sometimes rather insensitive or bumbling, a little foolish when he is continually trying to joke his way through things. The mother is not a fine woman. She has a maid, but she is used to hard work, and her husband claims that she works for the maid. She is a plain woman who likes best to see her children happy and fed, and everyone happily ensconced in a neat, little domestic life somewhere. In other words, how does Miller make their unhappiness seem great and important? How is it tragic? The father-son relationship plays a key part in the elevation of the material from merely unfortunate to tragic.

What is it that divides the younger people from the older ones? Is it their education? Their experiences in the war? How are the children more idealistic than the parents? Are children or parents more realistic? Students should cite not only events in the play, but specific lines to support their opinions.

In comparing the works within this part, students should decide why, for example, the rupture between Krebs and his parents is not tragic, not even necessarily unhappy, why we do not feel especially sad about the conflict between father and sons in the Chinese poem, and why "All My Sons" is more serious in content. Is the story of David and Absalom more like the Hemingway story or the Miller play? Is it simply death itself which makes a work tragic? How are the conflicts in these works similar, and how different? Answers to this question might range from the depth or complexity of the problem, to the point of view from which it is seen.

Part Four: The Individual in conflict with society.

Antigone

by Sophocles

At the opening of Antigone, all the machinery of the plot has been set in motion. Antigone has made her decision to defy the King's orders, and he has previously established what will be the fate of one who does so. Although there is some question, until Antigone is shut up in the cave, that the king might change his mind, the words of the prophet, Teiresias, make clear that fate must work itself out in tragic inexorable fashion. Creon will not change his mind or make amends, so Teiresias tells him he cannot alter the course of events, nor can even the gods. "And so the Avengers, Funies sent by Death/And by the gods, lie in waiting to destroy you/And snare you in the evils you have worked."

To a certain extent we may say that all the motivation and the impetus of the plot exist before the action of the play. The family relationships, for example, which are revealed gradually, contribute to the depth of the tragedy. Antigone is sister to Ismene and to the two dead brothers. She is the daughter of Creon's sister, and the betrothed of Haemon, son of Creon. We also learn that her two brothers were fighting against one another when they died.

Besides the familial relationships, we have those of the members of the state. Antigone is bound to obey her ruler, Creon. But she sees her conscience and her duty to sacred law as a stronger duty. Creon rationalizes his stand by outlining his duty to the ruled, to the state, and his view that to preserve this state and its unity, the ruler must be infallible, must be obeyed whether his rules are good or not.

We have here a similar problem to that which occurs in Darkness at Noon. Rubashov himself has been an instrument of the state, upholding the view that the state must be inviolate if it is to last, and finds that he himself cannot countermand the force of the state which he has helped set in action.

In Antigone, each important speaker sets forth his own moral position regarding the state, obedience to it, and individual conscience. Antigone states the traditional martyr's view that "the dead/have longer claims upon me than the living./There is my lasting home." She says she will not defy "the gods' commandments." Ismene is weaker. She says, "I mean them no dishonor; but when it means/Defying the state--I am not strong enough." Antigone replies, "You need not fear for me. Look after yourself." It is not physical hurt that she fears, but rather betrayal of her own conscience. She does not necessarily believe that she will successfully bury her brother, but that it is imperative to make the attempt. The honor of the attempt matters to her, while Ismene says why take a hopeless stand.

Creon enters defending his own stand. "The state keeps us afloat. While she holds an even keel,/Then, and then only, can we make real friends." So, although he admits that the king afraid to seek advice is damned, more important to him is the idea that the man who values friend (or individual) over country is damned. One should notice that Creon emphasizes his doubt that anyone would disobey him except for money. He can't conceive of disobedience because of private beliefs. "The greatest curse is money. It destroys/Our cities, it takes men away from home,/ corrupts men's honest minds. . . ."

The role of the Chorus in the Greek play deserves student discussion. Here it is a chorus of old men. The Chorus acts as interpreter, commentator, and gives certain stage directions, announcing, for example, someone's entry and manner of appearance. Though the chorus here seems to play some part in the actual play, as elders of the city, talking with the king, they are still somewhat out of the action. The old men of the chorus seem to be immune to the king's anger, for example. And at times they seem to fade into shadowy corners of the scene. Before Antigone is brought before the king, for example, the chorus speaks on the theme of man's dominion over the earth, man's pride as his overwhelming fault, man's mortality which he cannot control, and in general sets the mood of our reaction both to Creon and to Antigone. The chorus announces the unhappy entry of Antigone, and asks, "Have they arrested you?/Have you broken the royal commandment?" Then the chorus fades to silence, except at certain points where exposition is necessary. ("This is her father's willful spirit in her,/Not knowing how to bend before the storm." "Look the gates open and Ismene comes/Weeping for love and sisterhood . . . ." etc.) The chorus also fills in between scenes, when someone has moved offstage and someone else is awaited. The chorus thus cushions the shift between one time and the next, one event and the next.

Particular questions students might consider include the characterization and motivation of Creon, the way in which events are reported from offstage, the handling of suspense and interest when the outcome of the play has been more or less determined from the beginning, the manipulation of time in the play, and the characters' statements of moral positions.

Creon begins as a strong king, trying to set his country in order. When he says a king must be willing to follow advice, he is pointing out what he himself does not do. In the face of resistance, Creon grows both more determined and less certain. We might, at first, agree with him that the unity of the state must be preserved, but he oversteps his bounds; he calls for Ismene to be punished too. Gradually it becomes clear that he is not motivated by the good of the state alone. For one thing, his pride will not let him give in to a woman. He gives in to anger with his son and says, "Is the state to listen to any voice but mine?" He falls into incoherent raging when he calls for Antigone to be killed before his son, then forgets the order when Haemon leaves; says that Haemon "shall never save those girls from punishment," and then says that he means only to punish Antigone. He is not thinking clearly; he is under the sway of his prideful anger. With Teiresias, he again tries to say that only money could have persuaded people to disagree with him. He raves at and insults the old prophet, who, seeing that there is no reasoning with Creon, leaves him.

Finally Creon gives in, at the urging of the chorus, to release Antigone and bury her brother; he repudiates his self-elevation, but it is too late. Our last view of the king is of a broken and mourning man. "My hands can do nothing right;/I am crushed beneath my fate."

Although there seems to be a great deal of action in the play, one soon realizes that most of what is actually on stage consists of speeches and conversation, while the real action is reported, and happens off-stage. Greek tragedies characteristically dealt with violent events, but violence was not shown on stage. Staged murders, suicides, or battles can be difficult to present in a convincing way, but more important to the Greeks, not especially concerned with a naturalistic rendering of life, onstage violence would have detracted from the elevated tenor of the play. It would have been offensive rather than exciting.

Though we are not actually concerned with dramatic technique, in itself, in this unit, some mention might be made of the way this play compares to the Miller play, in the preceding group, in this respect. Joe Keller's death, for example, is reported rather than seen, and to good effect. Not only do writers concern themselves with common themes over the centuries, but they also make use, in varying degrees, of traditional techniques.

The death of Antigone's brothers, and the fate of Polynices, lying unburied, is announced by Antigone at the beginning of the play. The chorus, in its first speech, describes the action of the battle. Immediately after Creon has first set forth his ideas on kingship, a sentry enters and tells that Polynices has been covered up. And again, the sentry returns to report the strange and moving scene of Antigone's return to her brother's body, her anger and grief. "There was the girl; she gave a shrill sharp cry/Like a bird in distress when it sees its bed/Stripped of its young ones and the nest deserted." But when we actually see Antigone she is composed, majestically determined.

The imprisonment of Antigone is described, by Creon, by Antigone herself, before it actually takes place. We do not see her imprisoned, but are told that she is. The death of Haemon is reported by a messenger, who explains that Haemon killed himself because of his father's act. The Queen hears the news from the messenger, leaves the scene, and the messenger speaks apprehensively. "I shall go in and see, in case/She is keeping some dark purpose hidden from us/In her grief-torn heart. You are right to be concerned./It is just as dangerous to be too quiet." He returns to report that the queen, too, is dead, and describes the way in which the queen stood, with the knife, and cursed her husband as slayer of her son. So we see that all the violent actions of the play are kept offstage. This not only keeps the play from turning merely sensational, but also provides a commentator, in each case, on what has happened. Those who report describe, interpret, and draw conclusions on the tragic events. Emphasis is always on the reactions, on the emotions evoked by events. This also centers attention on Creon, for in him we see, before us, the effect of tragedy. He is the only one who really suffers on stage. The result is that the figure of the king stands, as in a spotlight, a proof that "The measure of a proud man's boasting/Shall be the measure of his punishment."

Darkness at Noon

By Arthur Koestler

Antigone was, in part, a story about the conflict between the individual conscience and the interests of the state. Antigone chooses to follow her conscience. Creon pretends to follow the interests of the state, but in truth he is guided neither by conscience nor public interest, but by his own pride. Ideally, we feel, individual idealism may coincide with what is also publicly right. For Creon to have listened to advice, to have done what Antigone wished, to have forgotten old wrongs and buried the dead, would probably have been better, also, for his country. We hope that society's rebels, those who listen to their own private notions of right, do so for the good of society. They may become something more than just sheep, conforming to the status quo, and by following the demands of conscience find and correct the faults which a society may have.

But it is difficult, even for the dedicated individual, to always determine when he is right. In Darkness At Noon, we might say that, to a point, Rubashov had followed his own conscience in supporting the state he helped create. But when he finds that he no longer truly believes in that state, he comes into conflict with his own, former values.

The entire book is really a trial. Rubashov is on trial, by the state. But he is also on trial to himself. His imprisonment marks the beginning of a long, inner search of his own motives. When he sees that he is really the victim of his own deeds, he must submit to destruction by the machine.

The book begins with, "The cell door slammed behind Rubashov." It ends with Rubashov's execution, with his falling into oblivion. Between beginning and end is the trial, Rubashov's trial by the state, and his own trial by self-examination.

Even more limiting, Rubashov has been shut up in a cell by himself. He only leaves the cell to be examined, and for supervised exercise in the prison yard.

The tapped out code between prisoners is one way in which news is brought to Rubashov. Rubashov's counter-revolutionary neighbor also serves as someone to react to Rubashov as a person, to give roundness to his character, even in such a fragmentary relationship. Number 402 shows antagonism at first, but comes round to a kind of friendship when Rubashov entertains him, and when, at the end of the book, Rubashov is about to be executed, 402 is the only person, who except for the old porter Wassilij, who at all regrets Rubashov's death. He calls Rubashov, "The Devil of a Fellow."

Another device which gives variety to the narrative is Rubashov's diary. The diary reflects the progress of Rubashov's moral consciousness. On the twentieth day of his imprisonment, he records a long meditation on "political maturity," and socialist theory. He writes, "It will probably be several generations before the people manage to understand the new state of affairs, which they themselves created by the Revolution.

"Until then, however, a democratic form of government is impossible, and the amount of individual freedom which may be accorded is even less than in other countries." And finally he says, "As the only moral criterion which we recognize is that of social utility, the public disavowal of one's conviction in order to remain in the Party's ranks is obviously more honourable than the quixotism of carrying on a hopeless struggle." When he says "personal feelings. . . are to be cut off root and branch . . . ." he is condemning himself for his steady development of personal feelings, expressed in what he calls "the grammatical fiction."

In a later diary fragment (p. 162) he acknowledges that he himself is no better than the "Neanderthaler" Gletkin, who is now persecuting him. Midway between these two excerpts, in the first of which he saw himself as something superior, distinct from the uncomprehending mass, and the last of which where he acknowledges his similarity to Gletkin, is an excerpt (pp. 73-75) which ends, "The fact is: I no longer believe in my infallibility. That is why I am lost."

The diary explains the "logic" upon which Rubashov has based his actions. Worked out to its logical conclusion, his argument leads to the rightness of his own extermination.

A third device which gives wholeness to Rubashov's character is the repetition of the dream of his first arrest. The dream reveals Rubashov's uncertainty, his awareness that he must come again to be caught. The curiously pathetic detail of the sleepy man trying to get his hand into the bathrobe sleeve reminds us of his humanity; he is rot infallibly logical. His system attempts to deal with humanity in terms of pure logic, and cannot account for that which doesn't fit into it. Like the dream, the recurrent toothache is also a sign of Rubashov's fallible humanity, which comes back to him from time to time, like a pain, irritating, inescapable. Both the dream and the toothache are associated with the "grammatical fiction," the "I" who feels emotions and, in a sense, embarrasses him.

Both the peasant who resisted the "pricking of the children," and the old man, tapping out ARIE, YE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH, serve as contrast to Rubashov. Each seems pathetically harmless. The old man furtively draws his map with his eyes shut. The peasant, with a mixture of defiance and puzzlement, says that he too is a "political person," a reactionary. Rubashov is much bigger game, and yet we wonder if there is any more sense either to his resistance, or to his conviction, than there is to theirs. There seems to be something wrong with them all, something unbalanced, unnatural, possessed, about them.

Arlova, Bogrov, the young man Richard, Hare-lip, son of Rubashov's friend, are all phantoms of his past actions which return to condemn him. Rubashov is continually caught between the fact that he did act out of public utility, but now for that same reason he will be condemned.

Each of these episodes, recalled out of the past, helps to recreate the picture of Rubashov's past life. It is not a pleasant picture. He has, himself, persistently set aside human feelings and relationships for the logical idea of the state. And yet, now, we are curiously sympathetic with him. This is, perhaps, because he is now the victim himself. And yet, we too are convinced, as the book progresses, of the logical necessity of his death. This is not because we sympathize at all with the system which he represents, but rather because he has helped create it, so there is ironic fitness in the conclusion. At the end, he seems to be a better man than the one who let Arlova go to her death. He has achieved an objective detachment from what is going on, from his own fate. He feels only a dim disappointment, disillusionment that "wherever his eye looked, he saw nothing but desert and the darkness of night."

In Sophocles' play, Antigone is hightly conscious of what she is doing, setting her will as an individual against that of the king or state. In Darkness at Noon, we do not feel that Rubashov was necessarily conscious, at any one time before his final arrest, of deciding to follow his own conscience on any particular matter. Only after he is arrested and has to review his life from the restriction of the prison cell, does he really realize the distinction between himself and the state. Though he must have been conscious of himself as an individual, a man with his own character and opinions, we sense that he felt that he was part of the state, or rather, it was part of him, in part his own creation.

Just what is the issue for which Rubashov is executed? Is it really the charges as they are presented? On what basis does he resist? Why does he not give in to Ivanov's compromise (p. 70), and why does he tell Ivanov, "Logically, you may be right. But I have had enough of this kind of logic. I am tired and I don't want to play this game any more. Be kind enough to have me taken back to my cell."

Before his execution, he asks himself, "For what actually are you dying? he found no answer." (p. 184) What then, is the point of the whole trial? It is difficult but important that students should recognize the ironical condition of Rubashov. On the one hand, he has insisted on logic as a guide for action. On the other hand, like anyone else he feels something else. "Perhaps it was not suitable to think every thought to its logical conclusion." Does he mean to say that men, perhaps, should act on emotion alone? Is Rubashov's "logic" always logical? This does not, of course, refer to any and all actions which might be termed logical. It refers to a theory of economics and the state. It refers to theory which insists that the objective entity of the state must be preserved over the subjective individual.

Students may have a difficult time deciding just what this book is about. They should try to compare Creon, in Antigone, to Rubashov. How does each one destroy himself? Students might, in fact, compare Rubashov to several characters in Antigone: Ismene, who wishes not to become involved; Antigone, who feels that there is a value superior to the state; Haemon, who does not care so much about the issue as about the people involved.

There is, certainly, a great deal of suggested material in this unit. Even so, the works have not begun to exhaust what we call literary universals. Birth and death, war, the quest or search, man's personal isolation, responsibility, the passing of time--we could organize literature of different ages into many such various categories: and still, as here, works would overlap and refuse to stay in just one place. You might well want to point this out to your students. Part one is particularly close to part three, and "David and Absalom" might be read as David's conflict between his personal feelings as a father and his duty as a king--Creon has such feelings. In a sense, Rubashov, of Darkness at Noon, is looking back at his life just as the speakers of part one are.

The unit has been planned to give a sampling large enough to convince, and to give some idea of what sort of themes we call "universals." If you cannot teach all the works, however, you will have to decide what is best for your own particular classes. A simplified version might include "The Seafarer" and Youth in part one; "The Second Shepherd's Play" and "The Journey of the Magi" in part two; and "David and Absalom" and "All My Sons" in part three. Those capable of handling it could go on to part four. Slower students might be somewhat perplexed by the philosophical musings of Rubashov, and by the sombre and classical progression of Antigone; however, for those who can handle the reading and get beyond the initial strangeness, the works should offer a great many exciting and pertinent ideas.

Finally, though again you must assess your own students, this unit has been planned to give a broad basis for discussion, with fairly general questions dealing with the larger issues, rather than point-by-point analysis. Perhaps it is better here to read a larger number of works, looking for the recurrence of significant themes and ideas, than to limit the works greatly. For it is hoped that this unit will present a modest cross-section of human concerns expressed in literature, old and new.

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DIFFICULT LITERATURE: A READER'S VIEW

I. Introductory Discussion

Definition of Difficulty

"This isn't interesting!" How many times have you heard this wail from your students? What they mean, though they don't always realize it, is that the assigned literature is too difficult for them. They fail to appreciate Dickens because they are unfamiliar with his England. They find Shakespeare dull because they cannot cope with his language, much less be entranced by his characters and plots. They are baffled by the unorthodox language of E.E. Cummings and the puzzling world view of Edward Albee. Yet a skillful, mature reader would have few difficulties with any of these writers. Difficulty, then, may be defined as an indication or measure of the gap in background between the actual reader or student and the well prepared, acutely perceptive ideal reader.

If the gap between the student and the ideal reader is moderate, then a given work will only fail to interest the student, though he may not actually call the work difficult. For instance, The Old Man and the Sea is simple enough that nearly any student can get something out of it. But, if he thinks that it is just a story about a man catching a fish--an article fit for Field and Stream--then The Old Man and the Sea is a difficult work for this student. If the gap between the student and the ideal reader is great, the student will be totally defeated. Here is the case of the student who starts to read Chaucer, Milton, or any other great writer, only to give up because he cannot follow even the basic narrative.

Defining difficulty in this way does not imply that the student is at fault for not being smarter or not having a better background. We all have limited backgrounds, in one degree or another as well as differing tastes. How many of us sit down to read Milton's Paradise Lost for the fun of it? How many of us honestly enjoy struggling with Chaucer's Middle English? Probably just a handful in each ease. We, as mature readers, have made our own treaty with literature; we know what we want to read and what we haven't the time or energy to worry with. Since students also have to make their treaty with literature, one goal of this year's curriculum is to assist them with this decision. None of us can tell the students how they should react to a difficult work, but we can explore some of the reasons why they find works difficult.

Why Literature Is Difficult

Implicit in the definition of difficulty as a gap between a real and an ideal reader is the idea that literature is a form of communication. The writer would communicate well with an ideal reader but often fails to move the real reader, for three chief reasons: (1) the reader's own limited background or deficient reading skill; (2) the writer's highly personal, and often quite obscure, expression of what may be a simple idea; (3) a baffling world which confounds both the writer and the reader. Of course, some texts may be difficult for all three reasons, but in the following discussion, as well as in your class presentation, it will be convenient to abstract these various causes.

Lack of Background. Undoubtedly, difficulties arising from your students' lack of background are the most common ones. You assign works of literature which all mature readers of English acknowledge as great, only to have your students reject them. It would be easy enough to get examples of this reaction: just mention Shakespeare, and your students will probably be less than enthusiastic. But, rather than start with such a difficult work as a Shakespearean play, this unit opens with James Thurber's "You Could Look It Up."

Though most of your students will have few difficulties reading Thurber's humorous story, they all are likely to miss some of his wit. Few students will catch the substitution of "Albert" for Thomas Alva Edison's middle name. Here, as elsewhere in this story, readers who are not alert are like people who miss the point of a joke, and it should be easy to show to your students that even good readers may miss some of Thurber's wit. As with Edison's wrong middle name, the reason for ineffective or undiscovered humor often is a lack of knowledge on the reader's part. For this reason humor dates more rapidly than almost any other type of writing. Even Thurber's basically contemporary story is dated: few of your students will recognize Ty Cobb as a great base runner or know that President Taft was fat.

A more vivid way of illustrating how much the humor depends upon the reader's knowledge would be to ask your students to speculate about the success of Thurber's story with non-American readers. If a reader had never heard of baseball, would he be able to get anything out of the story? How well could a non-American reader detect the humorous mispronunciations of the narrator? By the end of this discussion your students should begin to see that while they may not see everything in Thurber's story, they do bring a wealth of background details to bear on it. Here, then, is an excellent example of the relative nature of the gap which measures the difficulty of a work. Your students may not be ideal American readers of Thurber's story, but they are ideal readers, if compared with non-American readers.

Another way to look at this type of difficulty is to say that the greater the historical or cultural gap a reader has to surmount, the more difficult the literature becomes. One of the best ways to show this is by discussing the problems of linguistic change. The anonymous medieval lyric "Sumer Is Icumen In" illustrates this point because its unusual orthography and its archaic words will puzzle your students. The differences between the King James and the Phillips translations of I Corinthians 13 also illustrate the historical shifts in language. The King James Version speaks of charity as the greatest of virtues, whereas the Phillips Version uses love to designate the same concept. While charity may have had the proper connotations in the early 17th century it now has lost them; charity to people today has almost perjorative connotations because it implies something for nothing. Since your students will note other differences in these two translations, they also can consider which translation is less difficult and, hence, which translation is clearer to the modern reader. Shakespeare's description of the seven ages of man from As You Like It is another instance of dated language. Since the archaic words in this speech create difficulties, the students will be able to see that they often fail to appreciate Shakespeare or to find him interesting precisely because they fail to understand all that he is saying.

Besides purely linguistic problems, another reason students fail to appreciate Shakespeare and many other writers is that students do not have the historical or cultural knowledge which the writer assumes as common knowledge in all his readers. This is the sort of difficulty a non-American reader would have with "You Could Look It Up." In the case of your students, the poems further illustrate this problem: the anonymous "I Sing of a Maiden" and Ezra Pound's "Ballad of the Goodly Fere." To understand either of these poems, the student must, of course, understand the language; but he must also have a knowledge of the Christian stories upon which each is based.

Yet knowledge is far from enough. If we postulate that the author had in mind an ideal reader, then this ideal reader not only knows what is being said, but has some deeper appreciation or sympathy with the content. In "I Sing of a Maiden," there is a clear expectation of the pervasive medieval reverence for the Virgin Mary, a reverence which could be assumed then, but which is far from common today. In contrast, Pound's "Ballad of the Goodly Fere" is not a deeply reverent work, but the poet is still assuming some sort of Christian framework. Pound's unorthodox characterization of Christ is effective only if his readers visualize Christ as piously passive, a stereotype to which Pound seems to object. A non-Christian may intellectually realize that Pound's view of Christ is not the usual one, but such a reader misses a part of the emotional response which a Christian reader would have to Pound's irony. Thus your students should begin to see that they use their total intellectual and emotional background when they read literature; if this background is much different from the one assumed by the author, the piece of literature is difficult and will be uninteresting.

One further way this historical or cultural gap is indicated is in the connotative differences between words. We have already shown that a proper reading of I Corinthians 13 depends upon knowing the historical shift in the connotations of charity. But even if both the writer and his readers are from the same time and place, there may be difficulties in communication due to their unique set of connotations for given words. Even such a simple and common word as mother will mean something different to each member of a single family. In "Sonnet to My Mother," George Barker makes explicit some of the scenes and images which contribute to his unique set of connotations for mother. Of course, a modern writer can expect that most people will react favorably to the word mother, but no reader will react exactly the same way the writer himself does, and no two readers will have the same reactions. In every use of the word mother, the author's communication is less than perfect; in any piece of literature, with its dozens of words, the author's communication is inexplicably complex. Most readers never pause to consider this imprecision in communication until they discover a case of utterly conflicting connotations; yet this problem is always present and allows for the individual and conflicting responses to a work.

Originality of the Author. Sometimes, the difficulties may not be wholly the result of the reader's lack of background. The reader or student may be as well prepared and as mature as could be expected, and still the literary work may be difficult. The reason may be that the writer has purposely made his work difficult and obscure. A classic example of this would be T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," where Eliot even supplied his own notes so that his readers would know what primitive and oriental myths he was using. While the reader was expected to bring something to a reading of the poem, he was not expected to supply everything. A less striking example is Eliot's "The Hollow Men." Other poets who have their own unique frame of reference are William Butler Yeats and William Blake. Poets such as these construct, as it were, a personal mythology out of bits and pieces of ancient legends and tales; therefore, readers must be prepared to study, in order to approximate the responses the poet intended. Only after he has read a number of poems by Blake or Yeats, may a reader begin to see the implications within a single poem. Justifications for difficulties and obscurities of this sort are difficult to pin down, for they often depend upon the writer's own personal background. One reason Yeats used many Irish myths was his strong Irish nationalism. Blake's uniquely personal religious philosophy gave his works some of their puzzling quality. Thus, the difficulties in Blake's or Yeats' works would have to be justified on an individual basis.

Writers, especially poets, also are original in their uses of language. Various levels and types of language originality are part of the following illustrative poems: Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Pied Beauty"; William Carlos Williams, "The Yachts"; W. R. Rodgers, "Neither Here nor There"; Robinson Jeffers, "The Bloody Sire"; and E.E. Cummings, "What If a Much of a Which of a Wind." Of course, the Cummings poem is the best illustration of pure trickery with language, but all of the poems illustrate problems which a student may have with peculiarly poetic structures and concepts. The important fact is not so much that a poem such as Cummings' is difficult, but that the student at least see why such difficulties appear. Cummings expresses, among other things, man's transitory nature with the line, "Blow king to beggar and queen to seem." Once the student sees what Cummings is suggesting, he should try to explain why Cummings does not say literally what he means, rather than couch his meaning in unorthodox language. One explanation is that Cummings, like all poets, uses language in an unusual way so that he may emphasize his ideas and make them effective.

After all, one problem which writers face is that they have to make do with everyday language. Since everyday words are soiled and shop-worn from their constant usage and repetition, a poet must dust words off and use them in original ways if they are to be at all noticeable or striking. This brings up the whole question of originality and triteness, a subject which will be covered in a separate unit this year; but at this point the student should at least see the justification for some of the writer's originality so that he can see that perhaps some of the difficulties he has with literature are themselves justified.

A Complex World. Many writers, especially modern ones, write baffling works because the world they see is itself complex and inexplicable. Since every human being is the product of the millions of everyday incidents which are his life, the writer has the tremendously difficult problem of reducing this boundless web of experience into a coherent pattern. He attempts to create the illusion of reality out of the flimsiest and most limited of linguistic material, and what passes for his reality is more tightly organized and controlled than life could ever be. When this problem is added to the contemporary lack of a prevailing philosophy or belief, the writer's problems are only compounded. Earlier generations used religious ideas to structure the chaotic world around them, but the modern writer, with some notable exceptions, works without a unifying philosophy, unless it is some sort of faith in the progress of science.

Writers have reacted in various ways to the terrifyingly chaotic world which they must use for source material. Some, especially modern writers of short stories, have written stories that have been called slices of life; "The Use of Force" by William Carlos Williams is an example of this approach. In it, Williams traps on paper a single brief incident in the life of a doctor. The story contains few indications of why the narrator is telling it; thus, one of the reader's first problems is to decide what the author saw in the incident and what he expects the reader to see. But answering such questions brings up all sorts of other problems: why, for instance, did the girl try so violently to conceal her sickness? The slice of life, like life itself, is never complete, for the people in it have existences which extend beyond the boundaries of the story. Yet, unlike life, the dialogue and the narrative line are economical and to the point; no one would mistake them for a transcription of an actual incident.

Faulkner's "Barn Burning" is another example of the way a modern author copes with the uncertainty of knowledge or reality. Though the narrator is omniscient, incidents told in the story are limited in their reality. The boy in the story sees his father as a surrealistic figure cut from a sheet of tin because the boy knows no more about the father than if he actually were a tin figure. The incidents in the story, especially those toward the end, are unclear and murky; here, too, the narrator is reflecting the limited view of the boy, who is not aware, at least consciously, of all that happens during the one terrifying night. Throughout the story the narrator comments that the boy would later recall and reevaluate the incidents and that whatever the boy recalled would be different each time he thought about it; therefore, reality for the boy is not fixed, but changes with the boy's changing frames of reference. So it is with the reader, who is a different emotional person each time he sits down to reread a familiar story.

In contrast to the structured works of Williams or Faulkner, Edward Albee in "The Sandbox" avoids even the pretence of reality. No one would ever take Albee's creation as representative of reality. Albee purposely abandons realistic staging, and the action itself is not realistic. Probably the most realistic feature of the play is the dialogue, which approximates the rather aimless and repetitious character of actual speech; yet its very closeness to actual speech allows it to become a parody of the empty communication which often masquerades for human contact. By working in this fashion, Albee is demanding a great deal from his audience. It is his audience who must structure the experiences seen on the stage. When they see the young man exercising in the background, they have to relate him and his actions to the rest of the characters. Of course, Albee does have the young man identify himself as the Angel of Death, but the audience is still left to connect this unorthodox figure of Death with the rest of the play. There are, quite evidently, many other perplexing things in Albee's short play; yet the significant fact is that by presenting the absurd, Albee is reflecting an absurd universe and, in his way, presenting his material realistically. If the normal human experience is basically absurd or inexplicable, what could be more realistic than a set of absurd incidents which demand that the audience construct their own order? Albee's play, then, along with other examples from the theatre of the absurd, represents the extreme demands which may be made upon an audience's interpretative skill. Whether or not such demands are justified is another matter, but the students should see the reasons why some writers feel that this approach to literature is valid.

Student Reactions to Difficulty

The most usual student reaction if a book is fairly hard is to say that it isn't a good book. They may be right--if they are thinking of "good" as meaning good for their enjoyment; but they are wrong if they are using difficulty as the sole criterion for judging the critical worth of the book itself. Thus, they should distinguish between their personal tastes or preferences and the actual merit of a work. Difficulty is really not very helpful in deciding about the merit of a work because everything depends too much upon the acquired skill and innate intelligence of the reader. About the most that can be said is that if several skillful readers feel that a work is difficult and boring, then either it is so brilliantly complicated that it is beyond them, or it lacks the mature development of content and the sophisticated use of language which skillful readers demand. To find out which alternative is correct, one would have to study the structure and the language of the work. Therefore, difficulty for a mature reader is at best a sign of the presence or the lack of deeper critical characteristics.

Of more immediate importance is the personal reaction of students to works which they find difficult. It is, after all, a personal decision which leads them to pick Mickey Spillane over Graham Greene or to decide never to read another novel by Dickens. In effect, each student balances the expected difficulty of a literary work against the anticipated rewards. If the scholastic rewards appear to be sufficiently high, he will struggle through a novel by Henry James or Virginia Woolf, though he may dislike every minute of it. But, when a student is picking books for his own reading, which is what he will be doing after he leaves the classroom, the rewards will be the enjoyment he expects to receive from a given work. It is at this point that your teaching and this curriculum will be either vindicated or ignored.

Reading literature is a humanistic endeavor. This is a key point of the unit in this year's curriculum which deals with the timeless nature of literary topics. Human concerns with birth and love and death have never greatly changed. If the students see in that unit that literature (even of second- or third-rate quality) does illumine and enrich their own lives here and now, they will be in a position to balance the worth of great work with its attendant difficulty. Though this is an intrinsic and elusive reward, it still remains the chief reason people appreciate literature.

The troubling fact still remains that some of the most intrinsically worthwhile works are those which are difficult for the average student. Probably the best way to handle this problem is to point out to the students that "to read a book" is not a task which may be finished or completed in the usual sense. We all become more mature and sophisticated as readers the more we read and the more we experience. We all have had the experience of disliking a work the first time we tried to read it, only to enjoy it years later. What the students should see is that reading literature is a skill which may be developed. This point of view is, of course, a natural result of defining difficulty as the gap between an ideal and an actual reader. By definition, no one is an ideal reader, but the more someone reads, the closer he will come to the ideal goal. Another way of illustrating this sort of improvement is the increased enjoyment and heightened implications which we discover in a work which we reread; in effect, our first reading has made us a different person, one who responds differently to the very same situations.

In the final analysis, however, decisions lie with the individual student: he makes his own treaty with literature. In a way, reading literature could be considered an intellectual game which people enjoy for various reasons; some enjoy the plot, some enjoy rich characterizations, and still others enjoy using literature to play philosopher. Yet, whatever the type of enjoyment a reader experiences, it is the promise of enjoyment which will make him accept the challenge of a difficult work once he leaves your classroom.

II. Introductory Selection: "You Could Look It Up"

Background.

James Thurber's "You Could Look It Up" (In Short Story Masterpieces, pp. 508-524) is the opening selection because it foreshadows in a simple and evident way most of the areas of difficulty which will appear later in this unit. It has examples of dated language. It uses the American reader's cultural knowledge of baseball. It illustrates its author's originality and wit. But, most of all, since it is a humorous and readable story, most of your students should have little trouble reading it, yet should be able to suggest where problems of appreciation or interpretation might arise.

The most noticeable feature of this story is its language, which immediately tips the reader off to the nature of the narrator. The use of "begun" and "dropped down" in the first two lines tells any alert reader that the narrator is relaxed and casual, if not uneducated. By the time the reader has finished the first paragraph, the references to the "leapin' jumps" and the "old ladies at a lawn fete" should more than set the humorous mood of the story. From this point to the end the reader knows that all he needs to do is prop his feet up and enjoy both the story and the colorful narrator.

Enjoyment however, is not always as simple as it seems, especially if, as in this story, jokes and references go undetected by the reader. For instance, a number of the historical allusions will mean little or nothing to your students. Some may have heard of Charlie Chaplin, and others may know that Ty Cobb was a baseball player famous for stealing bases; but surely none of them will know that Rube Waddell and Rube Marquard, who are mentioned in the final paragraph of the story, were famous pitchers. Since they all will fail to realize that the baseball players mentioned, except those on Squawks' team, were real, they will fail to sense the solid grounding in reality which underlies Thurber's fictional character, Pearl du Monville. Another instance of the dated material is Pearl's use of "Skiddoo . . . twenty-three for you" (513). This expression was dated when Thurber wrote the story, but a good many students will not recognize it at all. The students will know that this expression, like some of the other expressions used by the narrator, is not current in American speech, but if they have never heard it, they cannot judge just how out of date the narrator really is. When such students hear "Skiddoo . . . twenty-three for you," they cannot visualize a young man wearing a sailor straw and linen duster and waving from a Stanley Steamer.

Another major source of humor, one which also depends upon the reader's background, is the narrator's use of erroneous facts or words. All readers will note the constant use of "Bethlehem" instead of "Bedlam," but most will miss such a sly substitution as the mistaken use of "Albert" for Thomas Alva Edison's middle name. The narrator's comparison of McGrew and Pearl with "Damon and Phidias" is another reference which will puzzle readers, unless they happen to know the story of the faithful friendship of the two Greeks, Damon and Pythias. Ignorance of this story will cause the reader to miss the irony which the author intends by having the narrator use (and misspell) these famous characters' names. The narrator's constant slips in usage also will go unnoticed unless the students know what is the usual educated pronunciation or spelling; if they do not know the difference between sit and set, they will fail to note the slip in "So he was settin' there" (510). In a way, these slips, as well as some of the pretentious usages (e.g., "bone-of-fida" on p. 515), all fall into the category of in-group jokes. Intellectuals who know that one sits at a table, but sets dishes on it, will be able to smile knowingly when the narrator slips up and chooses the wrong form.

After the students have begun to see how much the humor and the reader's enjoyment of the humor depend upon the reader's knowledge and reading skill, they should attempt a tentative definition of difficulty.

Though their formulations may differ from the one given in the opening section of this unit, they probably will see the desirability of using the idea of the gap between the reader's actual preparation and the desirable preparation. The important consideration is that they themselves work up their own definition rather than accept one given in this material or supplied by the teacher. With this goal in mind, the Student Version purposely omits defining difficulty; instead, the questions in the Student Version, as well as those which follow this discussion, attempt to show the students some of the factors they will have to consider before they can formulate a satisfactory definition.

Suggested Discussion Questions (Short Story Masterpieces, pp. 508-524)

1. Using evidence from only the first two or three paragraphs, is the English used by the narrator closer to written or to spoken English? Explain.

2. What do the phrases "It all begun" (508), "we was" (509), and "without it was" (509) tell about the narrator? How do most people react when a speaker makes continual slips in usage? Are they a source of humor? If they are humorous, what does the humor depend on? Is the humor a reflection of the listener's sense of superiority? What are some of the other usage slips in the first page or two of the story?

3. What common technique does the narrator use to describe the actions or attitudes of the baseball players? -- Comparison. Are any of the narrator's comparisons funny? ridiculous? Explain.

(1)* 4. Do the peculiar spellings in this story make it difficult to read? What conclusions can you draw about how much modern readers depend on a standard spelling?

(2) 5. Do you recognize the names of any of the baseball players Thurber mentions? Do you think any of them existed? How would the story be different if many of them were actual players and you recognized them? Why do many writers insert as many real details as possible into an imaginary or far-fetched story? Explain. -- It appears that Thurber distinguished carefully between the players on Squawks' team, all of whom are imaginary, and the other players he mentions, all of whom were real players. A student interested in baseball history could check this distinction in Hy Turkin and S. C. Thompson's Official Encyclopedia of Baseball. Examples of what the student will find are the background facts on Willie Keeler (518) and Tris Speaker (523): William Henry (Wee Willie) Keeler played as an outfielder, mainly with New York, from 1892 until 1910 and had a life-time batting average of .345; Tristram E. (Tris)

*A number in parentheses indicates that the question appears in the Student Version with this number; only selected general questions from the Teacher Version appear in the Student Version.

Speaker was an outfielder and a manager, mainly with Cleveland, from 1907 until 1928 and had a life-time batting average of .344.

6. Besides baseball facts, do you find any other facts or references dated or puzzling? -- The students will probably suggest a number of examples, including most of the following:

a. "President Taft" (509). This reference dates the incidents because Taft was President from 1909 to 1913.

b. "Thomas Albert Edison" (509). Edison's middle name was Alva.

c. "The funniest guy than even Charlie Chaplin" (512). Even today, many would claim that Chaplin's timing and sense of the comic have never been surpassed.

d. "Damon and Phidias" (513). Damon volunteered to be a hostage for the condemned Pythias, who wanted to visit his home before dying.

e. "Billy took a cut at one you could 'a' knocked a plug hat offa this here Carnera with it" (517). Primo Carnera,a near-giant, won the heavyweight championship in 1933, so the pitch must have been a little high.

f. "Hank was built like a Pope-Hartford and he couldn't run no faster'n President Taft" (517). A Pope-Hartford refers to a massive touring car common at the turn of the century; President Taft was extremely fat.

7. What are some of the unusual spelling errors the narrator makes? In what sense are these funny? What is the relationship between the narrator's spelling and pronunciation? -- Among the many examples the student may suggest, the following are the more interesting ones:

a. "Bethlehem" (514) instead of "bedlam." Here is an example of an intellectual joke, for the origin of "bedlam" was a mispronunciation of the name of a London hospital for the insane, St. Mary of Bethlehem; thus, Thurber restores the original word when he has the narrator use "Bethlehem."

b. "bone-of-fida" (515) instead of "bona fide."

c. "cryptly" (515) instead of "cryptically." Thurber might have intended a half-baked pun based on the word "crypt."

d. "Bucolic plague" (518) instead of "bubonic plague." Again the real meaning of "bucolic" allows for an amusing pseudo-pun.

(3) 8. Are any of the slang phrases puzzling or dated? What effect does the dated slang have on the story? -- Wentworth and Flexner in

The Dictionary of American Slang comment that "23 Skiddoo" is an example of probably the first nationally known fad word and that it is usually associated with the 1920's. You might see if your students recognized it when Thurber uses it on page 513 or if they even have heard of it. If they don't associate it with the 1910's or 1920's, what associations do they lose? Students who are interested might try tracking down other of the narrator's slang expressions in Wentworth and Flexner or in Berrey and Van den Bark, The American Thesaurus of Slang.

9. If Thurber does appear to have set his story in reality (see question 4), why does he include such far-fetched details as Pearl's flight into center field? Is such a far-fetched detail one which fits the character and pose of the narrator Thurber created? Explain.

10. Are there any indications in the story that the narrator is looking back and wants the reader (listener) to believe that everything is true? -- In addition to the title and its mention in the story, there are several side comments by the narrator: e.g., his comment on page 518 about the change in rules since the old days.

11. In any of the previous questions are there examples of Thurber's wit and originality? Do some of his tricks with language and distortions of facts make the story harder than it should be? Do you think he should have omitted any tricks of this type? Explain.

(4) 12. What traits or background would a reader have to have in order to appreciate fully Thurber's story? Do you think any single reader would be prepared for the story, or is Thurber himself the only one who would know everything about the story?

(5) 13. How difficult would Thurber's story be for a non-American reader? What specific items of information would he lack which any American reader would automatically have available?

(6) 14. How would you define difficulty (as applied to a literary work)? In what ways is it relative? Using Thurber's story, would you say that difficulty is best defined in terms of the reader?

15. Thurber's story is one bit of proof for the common contention that humor dates more rapidly than any other literary form. Can you think of any other examples of humor which would date rapidly? How soon will many of the comedies on television become dated? How lasting would you consider the topical humor of most of the stand-up comics on television?

16. In spite of the fact that Thurber's story appears in a book entitled Short Story Masterpieces, do you think it is truly a masterpiece? Does its dated quality add to or subtract from your opinion of it? What other criteria besides its relative difficulty would you use in judging whether it is a "masterpiece"? Is there anything in the identification of it as a "masterpiece" which is a reflection of the opinions of many people, not just one reader?

III. Historical Distance: Changes in Language

Background

Students often look upon printed material as something timeless and immutable and will exclaim, "That's right, I read it in a book!" Uniform orthography and a disregard for or silencing of the spoken word have combined to give print an existence all its own. One result of this emphasis is that modern readers, who are spoiled by the ever-present modernized editions of literary works, often forget a basic principle of language: every living language is constantly growing and changing.

It is this principle of language which creates many of the difficulties which students have with some of the great English classics. In the ninth and tenth grades, when the students first studied Shakespeare, some of the peculiarities of Elizabethan English were introduced; students will perhaps recall that language peculiarities caused them some difficulties in their reading of Shakespeare. Yet, all too often, students overlook the constant pressure of language change unless they stumble across a word which has definitely been lost from the current vocabulary; they forget that a word can change in meaning even though nothing really happens to its spelling or appearance. A good example of this is the use of charity in the King James Translation of I Corinthians 13. Unless a modern reader knows that the King James Translation uses charity in the sense of "Christian charity," he will receive the wrong meaning from the passage.

The following three selections should adequately illustrate the difficulties which historical shifts in language create for modern readers. Here, as in later sections, it may be desirable to omit one or more of the suggested selections; the individual teacher, working with each individual class, is the best judge of how necessary each of the selections is for accomplishing the purposes of this unit.

"Sumer Is Icumen In" -- Anonymous (Immortal Poems, p. 14)

This poem, which dates from the late 13th century, is the oldest surviving lyric in English. It, along with its music, was copied by a monk into his notebook. It is a simple lyric outburst about the glorious coming of spring.

The editor of Immortal Poems has maintained the Middle English spelling so that the student will immediately note the dated form of the English; next he will see that certain words have dropped out of English. Beyond these points, there is little that need be said.

1. Even though the editor glosses most of the difficult words, are there any others which seem somewhat archaic and difficult? What is a "mead"?

2. The editor translates "sterteth" as "leaps." What other modern word is visibly closer to the Middle English form, as well as having almost the same meaning as "leaps"? -- "starts"

(1) 3. Are the Middle English spellings of current Modern English words greatly different? How difficult are they to read?

(2) 4. Since the spellings of Middle English words differ from those of Modern English forms, what do you imagine is true about the pronunciation of Middle English as compared with Modern English? -- The following is a transcription of the poem with its Middle English pronunciation. The symbols used are those which were introduced in the eighth grade unit, Sounds of English. Since most of the consonant symbols are self-evident, the key supplied below contains only symbols for vowels and for troublesome consonants.

sūmər is īkūmen in

sūmər is īkūmen in
lūdə siŋ kūkū
grōwəθ sēd and blōwəθ mēd
and spriŋəθ ðē wūdə nū
    siŋ kūkū

awē blētəθ aftər lōm
luθ aftər kalvə kū
bulək stertəθ , bukə vertəθ;
    mūrī siŋ kūkū
    kūkū kūkū

wēl siŋes ðū kūkū
nē swīk ðū, nævər nū
siŋ kūkū nū! siŋ kūkū
siŋ kūkū! siŋ kūkū nū!

/a/	got	/ə/	cut, sofa
/ē/	gate	/ū/	rude
/æ/	hat	/u/	put
/ī/	he	/ŋ/	ring
/e/	pet	/θ/	thing
/i/	pit	/ð/	this
/ō/	go		

I Corinthians 13: Two Translations (Printed in the Student Version)

While the lyric "Sumer Is Icumen In" dealt with the obvious types of language change, a comparison of the two translations for I Corinthians 13 should begin to suggest the subtle changes which are continually remolding language meanings. The King James Version was chosen because it is unquestionably the best literary version of the Bible; the J. B. Phillips translation was chosen because it is the closest to the English of our own day.

1. When was the King James version prepared and first printed? -- In January 1604, King James I of England appointed fifty-four scholars to work on the new version of the English Bible. (There were other older English versions of all or part of the Bible: the Wyclif Bible (1395). The Tyndale Bible (c. 1526), the Coverdale Bible (1535), the "Great Bible" (1539), etc.) Working in six groups, the scholars appointed by King James used the Greek and Latin texts, as well as the earlier English translations; they were conservative but thorough. Their version of the Bible appeared in 1611.

2. Though the King James Version is over 300 years old, do you find many archaic words? Does the spelling of known words seem to be different? -- Though there are a number of archaic forms (e.g., "profiteth"), few of the language items have completely vanished from the English vocabulary. Of course, the spelling of the King James Version has been modernized.

(1) 3. What does the King James Version say is the highest of virtues? What does the Phillips Version say is the highest of virtues? Judging from their contexts, do both of these words stand for the same idea? See if you can define the concept being talked about.

(2) 4. If you saw the word charity without any context or even a clue as to its meaning, how would you probably define it? Would you feel that most people would like to be the recipients of charity? What sort of unpleasant overtones does the word seem to have?

5. If modern people wish to use the word charity to refer to the idea of Christian love, which is the intended meaning in this passage, what adjective do they use to modify charity? -- Christian.

(3) 6. From the preceding questions, what would you guess about the historical changes in the meaning of the word charity? -- The Oxford English Dictionary gives as one definition for charity the "Christian love of fellow men . . . Christ-like conduct," but the OED indicates that this meaning is current only in devotional literature today and is usually modified by Christian. This meaning of charity first appeared about 1175, but as early as 1154 the word charity also meant giving money to the poor; thus, from the 12th century on, two different meanings for charity were in existence. During the 300 years since the Elizabethan period, the strictly religious meaning for charity seems to have gone

out of favor. Therefore, Phillips had to find another word--love--to express the same idea in his translation from the Greek. The OED shows that love included the idea of Christian love as far back as 975, so that love existed as an option for the King James translators.

(4) 7. One of the most famous verses in the King James Version is verse 12. Why do you think it has often been quoted? Would you say that "darkly" is in common use nowadays or is it a poetical usage? -- The OED traces darkly back to Old English times and presents citations of its continued use (usually meaning either dimly and obscurely or evilly) up to the end of the ninetheenth century. Webster's Third Edition, Unabridged, indicates that darkly has continued to be used in the same ways up to the present day. Most current speakers of English, however, would probably feel that it is a rather rare word and would tend to substitute various synonyms for it.

(5) 8. What image or comparison does the Phillips Version use instead of saying "through a glass darkly"? Is the basic meaning the same in each translation? Though we can't say anything about the relative accuracy of the two versions as translations, which one do you think is clearer in meaning? More effective? Explain.

9. Another famous passage from the King James Version is the opening verse. Are any of the words in the King James Version unfamiliar or difficult? What is meant by the word tongues? Is this the same meaning of tongues as appears in verse 8? -- In the first verse tongues seems primarily to mean the various languages of men and angels; in verse 8, tongues seems to include the earlier meaning, but there is also a definite suggestion of the specifically Christian meaning of tongues, which is defined by the OED in the following manner: "The knowledge or use of a language; esp. in phrases gift of tongues, to speak with one tongue (tongues), in reference to the Pentecostal miracle and the miraculous gift in the early church." For this reference to the Pentacostal miracle, see Mark 16: 17 and Acts 2.

10. How does the opening sentence of the Phillips Version compare with the King James Version? Does the overall meaning seem to be any different? Has Phillips shifted the meaning by his omission of the word tongues? Which translation is the clearest in meaning? the most effective? Explain.

11. Do any of the other verses contain striking contrasts between the two versions? Give examples.

12. Which version seems more poetical? Do you think that the poetical quality of the King James Version is due only to its age and, hence, archaic structures?

(6) 13. Which translation is the better of the two? What criteria are you using in formulating your answer? Defend your decision.

"The Seven Ages of Man" -- William Shakespeare (Immortal Poems, p. 73)

Shakespeare's "The Seven Ages of Man" is a further example of the historical changes in language which may interfere with a modern reader's ability to interpret a passage. Though the students should perhaps consider why this is a famous speech, the more important aspect is that they see how its meaning is only partially apparent to a modern reader. Thus the following questions emphasize the shifting meanings of certain words and phrases.

(1) 1. Which words in this speech are either unknown or puzzling? -- The students may suggest a number of the words, most of which may be explained as still in existence, though perhaps rarely used; for example, "shanks" is still used in English, but some of the students may not be familiar with it. However, the truly difficult words are those which are archaic or have shifted in meaning: these are listed and explained in the following list:

a. "pard" (1. 12) -- a panther or leopard. The OED cites its first use as 1300, but labels its current (late 19th century) status as "Now only an archaic or poetic name."

b. "Justice" (1. 15) -- OED: "Justice of the Peace . . . an inferior magistrate appointed to preserve the peace in a county, town, or other district, and discharge other local magistrate functions."

c. "capon" (1. 16) -- OED: "A castrated cock." This is used in connection with a justice, for it was a common Elizabethan practice to pay a justice, perhaps even bribe him, by giving him several fat capons.

e. "pantaloon" (1. 20) -- OED: "The Venetian character in Italian comedy represented as a lean and foolish old man, wearing spectacles, pantaloons, and slippers." The word was originally derived from the nickname for a favorite saint of the Venetians -- St. Pantaleone. It is clear that Shakespeare was not thinking of a type of trousers, for the word pantaloon was not applied to the limited meaning of trousers until after the Restoration (c. 1660). It would appear that the limited use of pantaloon derived from the original stock character, who was known for his ridiculous trousers.

f. "pouch" (1. 22) -- This word probably refers to the leather pouch which commonly hung from a man's belt and was a form of wallet. This pouch, like the spectacles, pantaloons, and slippers, was perhaps part of the stock costume of a pantaloon.

g. "hose" (1. 22) -- OED: "Sometimes an article of clothing for the legs and loins, = breeches, drawers, esp. in the phrase doublet and hose, as the typical male apparel." The student will have to realize that hose were tight-fitting and that the author is joking about the ridiculous old man whose tight-fitting hose droop.

He should also realize that some men were quite vain about their well formed legs.

d. "modern" (1. 18) -- OED: "Every-day, ordinary, commonplace. (Frequent in Shaks.), Obs." Here is a good example of a word which gives no indication in either spelling or context that a different meaning was intended.

(2) 2. Do you find any examples of word order which is a little unusual or strange? Does the word order seem to make the speech harder for you to read?

3. How many references in the speech support or echo the basic comparison of men to actors? In what ways has Shakespeare carefully provided for the transition from one "age" to the next?

4. Does Shakespeare seem to see any stage of a man's life as pleasant and enviable? In what ways does he undercut and joke about a man's concern and appearance at each stage of his life? Could this be called an ironic view of man?

5. Would you characterize this speech as basically optimistic, or pessimistic? Explain.

(3) 6. What reasons can you suggest for the popularity of this speech, usually considered one of the gems of Shakespeare's creation?

(4) 7. What do you think about the quality of this speech? What criteria are you using to judge it?

IV. Cultural Distance

Background.

The previous section, as well as the introductory discussion of Thurber's short story, both have shown how important it is for a reader to know the historical facts which are common to the period a certain piece of literature comes from. Though cultural distance could be considered a sub-type of historical distance, there are some distinctions between these two types of problems. Most people associate facts or knowledge with historical problems, while the term "cultural distance" implies more than mere knowledge--it implies a failure to appreciate the everyday feelings and emotions of a different people, or even of an earlier form of one's present society. Thus, the readings in this section should suggest that even an intellectual knowledge is inadequate, unless it is paired with a thorough appreciation of the emotional forces assumed by the author. But even appreciation is not perfect, so it must be clear that no person from one culture can ever fully and completely appreciate a literary work drawn from another culture.

The short lyric "I Sing of a Maiden" certainly demands an intellectual knowledge of the religious facts upon which it is based, but your students should also see how different in subject this poem is from the modern literary subjects and types. Of course, some people today do have a fervent belief in the Virgin Mary and are probably just as devout as the writer of this poem or the members of his audience. The contrast is that the writer of this poem could count on an audience that totally believed in the Virgin Mary. Even in medieval poems with secular subjects, it was commonplace to refer to Mary's virtue and appearance. For instance, in several of the medieval ballads, men see the queen of the fairies and compare her to the Virgin Mary because they both are splendidly rich in appearance. While any medieval writer could mention the Virgin Mary and expect his whole reading audience to react with faith and reverence, a modern writer, unless he is writing for a small section of the population, cannot expect his audience to be religiously fervent.

Yet Ezra Pound's "Ballad of the Goodly Fere" also illustrates how much even modern authors do depend upon cultural ideas and patterns. In this poem Pound is "correcting" the usual stereotyped view of Christ. Some very religious readers might even take his poem to be sacrilegious; yet he clearly expects some feeling of the poem's irreverence in all his readers. Indeed, the effectiveness of the poem depends upon the ironic contrast between Pound's view and the usual view.

"I Sing of a Maiden" -- Anonymous (Immortal Poems, p. 14)

(1) 1. Assuming that the spelling of this poem has not been modernized, how would you date it? Compare both its spelling and the frequency of archaic words with "Sumer Is Icumen In" and Shakespeare's "The Seven Ages of Man." -- This is a fifteenth century lyric.

2. What ambiguity is the author drawing on when he chose to use the word "makeles"? -- Mary was without equal and without a mate.

3. What sort of rhyme scheme does the poet establish? What sort of metrical pattern does he use? What do both of these facts tell you about the pronunciation of "makeles"? -- It has three syllables.

4. What techniques does the poet use to tie together the various stanzas? -- Aside from the rhyme and meter, the poet also uses incremental repetition (that is, inexact repetition of lines which change from use to use).

(2) 5. Would you say that this poem presents an idealized picture of Christ and the Virgin Mary? Explain.

(3) 6. Would you say that the poem was best characterized as simple or as complex? Does its simplicity increase or decrease the amount of reverence which the poet seems to be conveying? Explain.

(4) 7. If somebody 400 years in the future made an anthology of twentieth century poetry, would he be likely to include many poems about Christ and the Virgin Mary? -- The students can speculate about this question, but their reaction should be compared to the anthologies we have of medieval poetry, where easily more than half of all surviving poems deal with Christ and the Virgin Mary.

"Ballad of the Goodly Fere" -- Ezra Pound (Immortal Poems, pp. 526-7)

1. One of the first problems in this poem is to locate or explain in some fashion the many references to incidents in Christ's life. While some students may know the Biblical stories, it might be well to have various members of the class read and report to the class the background on the incidents Pound refers to. A few of the possible references are the following:

Simon Zelotes -- Luke 6:15
ll. 5-8 -- John 18: 1-14
ll. 13-14 -- Mark 14:12-21
ll. 17-20 -- Matthew 21:12-16
ll. 39 -- Matthew 27: 45, 51-54
ll. 45-48 -- Matthew 14:22-36
ll. 53-54 -- Mark 15:36 or Luke 24:13-35

(1) 2. In lines such as 7-8 and 11-12, how mild-tempered is Pound's Christ in comparison with the Biblical versions? Why does Pound make Christ different from the Biblical version?

(2) 3. Where else in the poem is there an ironic gap between the usual picture of Christ (based on the Bible) and Pound's statements about Christ? -- A couple of the more striking ironies are the statement that "we drunk his 'Hale' in the good red wine" at the Last Supper and the boasting tone of Christ's statements in ll. 27-32.

4. One puzzling line in the poem is the next to last one, when Simon says that he had seen Christ "eat o' the honey-comb." A likely interpretation is that this is an ironic comment on the sponge filled with vinegar, which was given to Christ while he was being crucified. Another possibility is that the reference to "honey" draws on the life-giving qualities of honey in order to suggest the rebirth or resurrection of Christ. A final possibility is that it refers to Christ's actual breaking of bread with the two disciples who see him after the resurrection on the road to Emmaus. After these three possibilities are mentioned to the students, they might consider which seems most likely.

5. Why is the poem called a ballad? -- It is written in the typical ballad stanza: with a rhyme scheme ABCB and a meter 4343.

6. What does Simon mean in the sixth stanza (ll. 21-24)? What belief is Pound rather directly challenging about the Bible? Why is it that Christ did not actually write down his message, but allowed it to be transmitted by word-of-mouth, until it was finally written down by

his disciples and later Christians? -- One possible answer is that Christ lived in a non-book culture, where the printed word was not the main form of language; another fact is that the bulk of the people could not read or write, so that a written message was more limited than an oral one. For further information on this concept see Marshall McLuhan, The Gutenberg Galaxy (1962).

7. Why does Pound use the ballad form, the contractions, and the archaic word "fere"? Does it have anything to do with the nature of the speaker? Is Pound's poem historically accurate in this respect?

(3) 8. Why does Pound draw the ironic picture of Christ which emerges from this poem? How do you think Pound expected his audience to react? How many of you reacted in this fashion? Explain.

9. In another unit this year, you may have read T.S. Eliot's "Journey of the Magi." Does Eliot use the same ironic contrast which Pound uses? How would you contrast the tones of these two poems? Which seems to follow the Biblical account more closely? Which is the more difficult?

V. Personal Connotations

Background

No two people ever draw the same meanings or emotions from a literary work. Even if they are from the same historical era, the same cultural background, and even the same family, they still will have individual reactions to any given literary work. It is the unique nature of language and communication which is responsible for this fact. A child who is learning a new word hears it in various contexts, and from these contexts he is able to generalize a meaning for the word and to begin using it in his own original contexts. Since the possible contexts for any single word are virtually unlimited, it follows that no two people will have the same set of connotations for a word. For instance, a common word like mother is used to name millions and millions of mothers in the world, each one of whom is unique and distinguishable from the others. The child who associates certain feelings and emotions as the background for his uses of the word mother. Thus, no two readers of the word mother in a literary work will come away with quite the same meaning. A concrete example of this fact is George Barker's "Sonnet to My Mother." In this poem Barker has included some of the images which he personally would cluster around the word mother, and his images are so original that they should illustrate how unique will be a person's response to a single word, much less to a literary work comprised of dozens and dozens of words.

"Sonnet to My Mother" -- George Barker (Immortal Poems, p. 601)

1. In what way does the word "seismic" in line 3 depend upon the image given in the first half of the line?

2. What word in line 4 tends to personify the gin and the pieces of chicken? What does the author accomplish by mentioning her "Irish hand"?

(1) 3. Who was Rabelais? What associations is Barker probably expecting to awaken with his mention of Rabelais? -- Francois Rabelais (c. 1494 - c. 1553), a French writer and physician, is famous for his Gargantua and Pantagruel. Since some of the humor in this work is earthy, the adjective Rabelaisian has come to mean an earthy and sensual delight in the elemental relationships of men, especially sexual relationships. By using Rabelais in speaking of his mother, Barker is saying that she genuinely appreciated life in all its aspects, even the more earthy ones.

4. How would a little dog following a brass band affect a crowd? What does this comparison say about the mother?

(2) 5. Taking into account the references to his mother's size, to the gin in her hand, and to her Rabelaisian spirit, would you say that Barker is essentially complimentary? Explain.

6. In the first two lines of the sestet, what "bomber" is Barker probably referring to? -- Barker, an English poet, is probably recalling the Nazi bombing of England during World War II.

7. What Bible verse do lines 11 and 12 echo? -- They appear to echo I Corinthians 13:2, which was read earlier in this unit.

8. It is clear that Barker in the last line is playing with the similar sounds of "mourning" and "morning." What connection, however, do you see between the meaning of "mourning" and the rest of the poem? What does "morning" mean?

9. Why is this poem called a sonnet? How are the octave and the sestet of this poem connected?

10. How skillful does Barker seem to be in his rhyming, especially in the octave?

(3) 11. How many people would see their mothers in this very same set of images? Do you imagine that if Barker had sisters or brothers, they would see the mother in the same light as Barker himself does?

(4) 12. If a person had never known his mother, or had been mistreated by his mother, what associations would come to his mind when the word mother occurred? How successful would such a person be in his reading of Barker's poem?

(5) 13. What sort of personal associations do you see as possible with such common words as dog, chair, Cuba (consider its connotations in

1950 and at the present time), baseball, or spinach? Upon what sort of evidence or experience do your associations for these words depend?

(6) 14. If a writer used such words as you examined in the previous question, could he be certain that his readers would receive the same images or associations which he intended? Does this tell you anything about why a literary work is not always easy to talk about and why people will differ in their responses?

15. For further information and exercises on connotation see Richard D. Altick's Preface to Critical Reading, Fourth Edition, 1960, pp. 3-47.

VI. Author Originality: Modern Poetry

Background

Few of your students will need to be told that poetry is often difficult to read. It is this difficulty with poetry which is responsible for their universal plea: "Why do we hafta read poetry? Why can't we read stories? The students fail to see that poetry says anything relevant to their lives, for all too often the poetry they have even poorly understood has been about daffodils and fringed gentians. Thus, the goal of this unit is not only to explore some of the reasons for difficulty, but also to attempt to show that poetry does have a connection with everyday life. Only if they see this connection with their own world, will they have a basis for deciding whether or not the difficulties which the poet has introduced into his poem are at all justified.

Reasons for difficulty in poetry are fairly easy to list and will be illustrated in the various modern poems used in this section. First, a poet often uses words which are rare or archaic. Second, these and other words often appear in a peculiarly poetic syntax. Third, besides syntax, there are other complicating poetical devices, such as rhyme and meter. And finally, though it is in many respects a reflection of the poetical syntax, metaphoric language is the major feature of poetry. Since all of these reasons for difficulty reflect deviations from normal spoken language, it is no wonder that the student is baffled or even defeated when he attempts to read poetry.

Justifying these difficulties is the problem. One way is to compare poetry with a sophisticated game. Robert Frost said that writing unrhymed poetry was like playing tennis with the net down; what he forgot is that it would still be possible to play a fast game of quasi-tennis even without the net. In other words, there are all sorts of rules and restrictions which one may arbitrarily decide to follow. In poetry the rules for a sonnet may be quite explicit, yet other types of poems, ones which may have little evident form, will still be tightly organized around some principle or pattern. Perhaps the author has an elaborate and repeating set of images, the pattern of which is well concealed from the casual reader who would note a rhyme scheme, but who would have no luck with this pattern of images. Or, a poet like Gerard Manley Hopkins may work with his words so that the sounds quite subtly reinforce his meaning and supply a unifying pattern. Once a reader of a poem detects such patterns, he can begin to appreciate the skillful gamesmanship of the poet: he begins to play the poet's game.

But the main area of common ground or knowledge which allows a poet even to begin is the normal syntax of the language. Every speaker of English knows that which in the question Which book did you want? is properly used; he also is immediately fascinated, perhaps puzzled, when a poet uses the phrase of a which. He knows that the writer has violated a basic rule of English--that which is never modified by a. A poet, or any writer, has to depend upon his reader's knowledge of the common or ordinary functions so that this same reader may be shocked, intrigued, or in some way awakened by an unusual use of language. This fact also explains a good deal of the metaphoric language, whether or not it is syntatically unusual. When Alfred Noyes speaks of the road as a "ribbon of moonlight," he is inviting his readers to see the moonlit road through different eyes. If the reader is not surprised or awakened by the image, then the poet's figure of speech is a failure. This is what happens to a figure (e.g., Noyes' "a ribbon of moonlight") which is heard so often that it loses some, perhaps all, of its freshness or charm.

But we are encroaching upon another discussion in this year's work, where the whole question of originality will be investigated; for the present unit, it is sufficient to note that a poet's struggle for originality is often the cause for much of the difficulty in his works. This means that the reader must decide how much of this difficulty he himself wishes to bother with; for if a work becomes too difficult, its charm or freshness is lost. Thus the poet knowingly violates certain rules of language, but the conventions of his art demand that he not deviate so far from the normal language that his art becomes incomprehensible to even the best of readers. Once this relationship is assumed, then poetry that is made up of random lists of words ceases to be art, which by definition implies a form.

Just as the student had to decide how much background he should bring to a historically or culturally alien work, so the student will have to decide for himself the degree of author originality or individuality he wishes to bother with. Once he sees what modern poets are up to, we might hope that he would find a difficult writer like E.E. Cummings interesting to read, yet the final decision is a personal one. The student must make his own treaty with modern poetry, just as with all literature.

Note: In this section, as elsewhere in this unit on literary difficulty, it may be desirable for the individual teacher to limit the class reading to only one or two of the suggested selections.

"Pied Beauty" -- Gerard Manley Hopkins (Immortal Poems, pp. 458-9)

1. One of the first difficulties which students will have with "Pied Beauty" is that they will be unfamiliar with some of the words Hopkins uses. Therefore, with poorer classes it would probably be desirable to introduce several of the harder words before the class reads the poem. A better class may be left to do its own dictionary spadework. Words which are difficult and might warrant some mention are the following:

pied: two or more colors in a variegated pattern.
brinded: (Archaic form of brindled) dark streaks on a light background
stipple: dotted or flecked colors made by successive touches of a a brush--applied to the same type of pattern in nature.
fall: (1) the season; (2) the fall of leaves. In England fall is an archaic form of autumn.
fold: (1) an enclosure for sheep; (2) an enclosed yard or piece of ground--Obsolete in England, though still used in some dialects.
fallow: (noun) a piece of ground that is untilled or unsowed.
plough: (noun) a piece of plowed land.
trim: (noun) condition of gear or equipement--e.g., "hunting trim."
counter: opposite.
spare: (1) unused or superfluous; (2) scanty or meager.

(1) 2. What is the scene pictured in the first half of the fourth line? -- Here is a fine example of the multiple ambiguities which abound in Hopkins' poetry. If fall is considered the fall of leaves, the "chestnut-falls" could mean the falling of the chestnut leaves, which are reddish, as the adjective "fresh-firecoal" implies. A second possibility is the use of fall to mean autumn; hence the line would refer to the succession of autumns, all glorified by the reddish hues of the chestnut trees. A third possibility is that falls may refer more specifically to the nuts which fall making a circle on the ground and reflecting the dark,black sheen which is characteristic of fresh coal, which has yet to become a glowing red as it burns. We each, as critics, may feel that one interpretation is more likely than the others, but the important fact for Hopkins' poem is that all of these meanings (and possibly others) exist simultaneously.

(2) 3. What ambiguity is possible if the word "couple" in the second line is considered first as a noun (meaning two) and then as a verb (meaning to pair up or to connect)? What sort of sky is being described?

4. How specifically can you describe each of the images or scenes which Hopkins mentions in lines 2, 3, 4, and 5?

(3) 5. Since the word pied in the title introduces the idea of contrast, how many other contrasting images or traits appear in the poem?

(4) 6. What is the term for the repeated use in line 4 of "f" as the opening sounds of words?

(5) 7. Where else in the poem do you note examples of alliteration? What reason can you give for Hopkins' extensive use of alliteration?

-- Hopkins, in some of his critical writings, compared poetry to music; thus you might see if your students see any relationship between the large amount of alliteration and the quality of music. It is hard to make a connection between Hopkins' use of alliteration and the actual meaning of the poem, but certainly the alliteration does call attention to certain words and patterns of words (e.g., the contrasting pairs in line 9).

8. Where would you place the heavy of main stresses in this poem? Be sure to read it aloud as you scan it. -- There will be some individual variation in the way it is scanned, but most will agree that Hopkins seems to be fond of occasional spondaic feet (e.g., "fold, fallow," "all trades," etc.). Again the musical qualities of meter might be suggested.

9. What does Hopkins accomplish by his frequent use of spondaic feet? Give examples.

10. Does Hopkins always have a set number of unaccented syllables between his accented ones? -- While most of the lines of "Pied Beauty" have 5 stressed syllables (some have 6), there is a good deal of variation in the number of separating unaccented syllables. This variation is an example of what Hopkins called "sprung rhythm."

11. Since the last two lines in the poem form a sort of resolution or conclusion, how do they connect with the earlier description of pied and temporal things? -- Once again Hopkins uses a compound word, "fathers-forth," to suggest several overlapping meanings. The normal phrases might be "springs forth" or "bursts forth," but Hopkins uses the word father in order to draw upon its various connotations, including, of course, the idea of God the Father.

(6) 12. What aspects of this poem did you find to be most difficult? How much of the difficulty would you credit to the poetical devices used by Hopkins and how much to defficiences in your own background?

(7) 13. If Hopkins had wanted to praise God and His creation, why didn't he just say what he had to say without all the images of "chestnut-falls" and the "finches wings"?

14. It has been said that poets are "intoxicated with words." Do you find any evidence in Hopkins' poem that he would fit this description? Does this feeling for and ability with words justify any aspects of his poem? If poets are intoxicated with words, what sort of readers should the readers of poems be?

(8) 15. Would you say that Hopkins' poem is worth reading? What elements and considerations must you consider if you are really fair about answering this question?

"The Yachts" -- William Carlos Williams (Immortal Poems, pp. 521-2)

1. Under what physical conditions do the yachts compete or contend?

2. In how many ways does Williams suggest the fragile or insignificant quality of the yachts?

(1) 3. Do you find any of Williams' phrases describing the yachts and the sea particularly vivid or effective? Explain.

4. What is so horrifying about the last three stanzas? Is this horror foreshadowed in the earlier stanzas? -- The only element in the first eight stanzas which perhaps foreshadows the horror at the end is the feeling that the sea can take the yachts and break them at any time, if it so chooses.

(2) 5. What does the ghastly scene at the end suggest about what the yachts themselves represent? -- The phrases "lost to the world bearing what they cannot hold" and "failing, failing!" both suggest that the people floundering under the yachts are those who have not been successful in the race--the race, perhaps, of everyday existence and competition. Thus, the yachts become the symbol for those who, through skill and callous unconcern, even ignorance, brush others aside in their design for success. These successful people are not protected from failure; after all, the world (represented by the "ungoverned ocean") is able to dash them to bits if they are not careful. However, the race for success continues, even after the successful person realizes that he is sacrificing others to his own purposes and goals.

6. Following the interpretation just suggested in question 5, what does the cheerful, carefree condition mentioned in lines 15 to 18 seem to suggest? In what way is it significant that the yachts only "appear" so to the slow ships which are not in the race itself?

7. Though Williams' poem is printed as if it were poetry, are there any signs in the words or their structure that this is a poem? What do you mean when you say that it is a poem, not prose? -- Though William's poem does not have rhyme, there is a metrical scheme of some 5 or 6 accents per line; Williams also likes to use the spondaic pattern which occurred in Hopkins' poem "Pied Beauty." However, the most telling poetical feature of Williams' poem is the metaphorical language and the heightened sensitivity to words; for example, the phrases "Moth-like in mists," "broad bellying sails," or "a well guarded arena of open water."

8. Williams clearly chose the extended comparison between the yachts racing and the race of life or of existence. What other sorts of contests or races might Williams have chosen if he had wished to represent the brutal race of life? Does a yachting race seem particularly well chosen as the concrete basis for his comparison?

(3) 9. Did you find anything about this poem difficult? Would reading it be just as easy as reading a prose summary of the same idea?

(4) 10. Do you think Williams' poem is a better one than Hopkins' "Pied Beauty"? Upon what considerations are you basing your answer?

If you had to choose between a book of poems by either Cummings or Hopkins, which poet would you choose?

"The Bloody Sire" -- Robinson Jeffers (Immortal Poems, p. 531)

1. In the first stanza, would the words "play," "bark," "speak," "blasphemies," and "sire" be considered poetical or figurative in meaning? What term is used to describe a poet's crediting of life to inanimate objects?

2. In the second stanza, what two reasons from nature does Jeffers give for saying that violence is a necessary part of the world?

3. Do you find any further examples of personification in stanza three? Do they tend to complicate the meaning? Why doesn't Jeffers say what he means rather than "the wolf's tooth chiseled"?

4. Can you supply the historical background of the two incidents in stanza three? What connection is there between Christ and the "cruel and bloody victories of Caesar"?

5. Does Jeffers use any poetical devices, such as rhyme, meter or repetition? What is the purpose of the devices he does use?

(1) 6. Suppose someone stated: "War and violence have been positive factors in the orderly growth of nature and in the progress of human society." Why isn't this just as good as Jeffers' statement of a similar idea? Do you think the meaning of a poem can be reduced to a few sentences? Explain.

(2) 7. Probably you found this poem to be a good deal easier than either "Pied Beauty" or "The Yachts." What does this say about you? about the poem?

(3) 8. In what way would the effectiveness of this poem vary with the background of the person reading it? To what extent would personal connotations affect the reader's response to it?

"Neither Here nor There" -- W. R. Rodgers (Immortal Poems, pp. 591 -2)

1. In the first stanza, how many of the poet's statements could be called abstract statements about the world he is presenting? Give examples. -- Of course, the opening line with its "Is" and "Ought" (both capitalized) are the key examples, but there are others.

2. What is the purpose of the concrete phrases, such as "no oats growing"? How do these concrete phrases comment on the passive land of "neither here nor there"? -- Many of these are used as symbols; for example, the phrase "No walls anywhere" is intended to represent the practical concerns for property and protection which are missing from the land Rodgers is describing.

(1) 3. Would the phrase "no locked ponds / Of settled purpose" appear in normal spoken English? In what way is it poetical? If you used a transformational grammar of Standard American English, could you generate such a phrase? In other words, in what respect is this phrase exceptional? Can you find other examples of such phrases?

4. Does the passive, lifeless quality of the world described remind you of the world described in any of the poems studied earlier this year? -- The poet echoes T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men," especially the lines in the last stanza, beginning "Between the act . . ."

5. How desirable or attractive is the world described in Rodgers' poem? If there is neither "yearning nor scorning," would there be any unhappiness? If unhappiness is removed, what does this seem to imply about the possibility for happiness?

6. In what respects is the land Rodgers describes similar to the theological or classical conception of limbo? -- Limbo, which was situated at the edge of Hell, was the place where souls of righteous pagans and unbaptized infants remained eternally; they were not punished, but they also were deprived of the joys of being in the presence of God. Thus, limbo would seem to be quite similar to the world Rodgers is describing.

(2) 7. Were you able to explain all of the concrete references made by Rodgers to the physical characteristics of the land? If you had difficulty with some of them, would you say that it was because you didn't see what Rodgers intended, or was it because Rodgers purposely inserted multiple meanings and implications?

(3) 8. Since the poet is clearly giving only a description of "neither here nor there;" do you think that it would be sufficient to give only the title? After all, we all can supply the dreamy, passionless connotations which reside in the phrase "neither here nor there." What, then, do you see as the role of the poet or writer?

"What If a Much of a Which of a Wind" -- E.E. Cummings (Immortal Poems, p. 555)

(1) 1. How would you interpret the first two lines? What does Cummings do which complicates the problem of interpretation? -- The first line contains a good example of Cummings' habitual use of violated or distorted syntax; the words "much" and "which" are the clearest examples but Cummings even chooses to speak of "a wind," rather than the more common "the wind." In the second line the trouble lies less with syntactic peculiarities than it does with the unusual or idiomatic meaning of "gives the truth to." Assuming that summer's promise is that the flowering and healthy fertility will continue forever, the first part of the line means that the wind in the first line will refute with truth summer's promise, thus proving the promise to be a lie.

2. What actual physical scene is Cummings giving in his suggestion that the "wind . . . bloodies with dizzying leaves the sun"? Where else in the poem are the images similarly concrete and vivid?

3. Who is the subject of "Blow" used in the fifth line of each stanza? Is it the wind which must "Blow king to begger? or "Blow hope to terror"? -- From syntax and structure, Cummings eliminates "wind" (in stanzas 1 and 2) or the "dawn" (in stanza 3) from being the subject; the fourth line of each stanza contains the question mark signal indicating that the question started in the first line has ended. Of course, "Blow," in contrast to "gives" or "bloodies" or "strangles," is an indefinite imperative, the subject of which is only implied. Cummings implies that the whole world and the people of the world may blow the set order to disorder, but in the end the spirit of man will still be the "single secret," the hope for a rewarding future.

4. Which of Cummings' pairs or contrasts in lines 5 and 6 of each stanza do you find most effective? Can you suggest what Cummings means by each of them? What similar pattern do you detect in all of the pairs? -- Each of the pairs is made up of an admirable trait or concept, followed by a less desirable one. The basic opposition is best summarized, perhaps, by the pair "soul to mind." The soul implies the distinctly human and inexplicable character of man's existence--the world of "friends," "hopes," "pity," and "life;" while the mind implies something which is coldly calculating or scientific--the world of "fiends," "terror," "envy," and "isn't." Of course, this view is an over simplification, and questions remain: e.g., in the phrase "death to was," is "death" a positive trait?

5. Where in each stanza does a bit of the positive or the optimistic seem to appear? Do you consider the last two lines of the poem optimistic? If so, how do you explain the phrase "the most who die"? -- Through out the poem Cummings has presented a rather bleak view of the world, indicating that things are continually changing and perhaps turning out to be less than desirable, (e.g., the pairs discussed in question 4). Cummings seems to saying that death is a necessary ingredient in the everyday life of man; to die is to be human and living. Of course, since this view is paradoxical, it should only serve better to illustrate the paradoxical nature of the "human condition."

(2) 6. What principle has Cummings used in organizing the content of this poem? Does he depend upon the traditional elements of meter or rhyme? Do you detect a common stanzaic pattern?

(3) 7. Where in this poem has Cummings most strikingly violated the normal syntax of English? Why do you think Cummings chose to use his words in this fashion?

(4) 8. Why does Cummings ignore the conventions of punctuation and capitalization? What difference does it make how a poem is printed on a page? -- Cummings was quite aware of the effect of peculiar typography on a reader; thus he often used not only unusual punctuation and capitalization, but he also stipulated the actual spacing and printing format of

his poems. "What If a Much of a Which of a Wind" is not a good example of this latter trait, but many of Cummings poems are so spaced on the page that the spacing will indicate the meaning, as well as how the poem should be read. A good example of this are the poems in Cummings' series "Chansons Innocentes."

(5) 9. In what respect is it possible to specify the meaning of Cummings' poem? What would be lost if the poem were to be summarized in a couple of sentences? Is there any basis for saying that the poem is virtually a living, breathing object?

(6) 10. What in Cummings' poem causes the most difficulty for a reader? On what grounds can you justify the difficulties which Cummings purposely includes in the poem?

VII. A Complex World

Background

It is almost a cliché to assert that life is complex, yet the complexity of life is all too often forgotten or ignored. Each of us has stock beliefs or tired stereotypes which oversimplify or distort the world around us. We are ready to believe that all truck drivers are burly and uneducated or that all doctors are charitable humanitarians. Once we pause to consider such generalizations, we realize how ridiculous they really are. The real world, after all, is just not this simple. Each single individual is so unique, as well as complex, that no other person can ever hope to explain all that he thinks or feels. The individual himself may even be puzzled by his own behavior.

Faced with a world of such inexplicable complexity, the writer must strive to construct an artistic reality of some sort. The most obvious, yet often forgotten, limitation is that he must enclose the infinite set of human experience within the finite confines of language. And even the amount of language he may use is limited by the practical concern of time and reader endurance. Therefore, the highly ordered, artificial linguistic creation of the writer has the nearly impossible task of representing reality.

A further complication is that reality varies depending upon the cultural or philosophical background of the writer and his audience. In the medieval era the incidents of daily life and existence were interpreted in the light of a religious order in the world. It was felt that to understand the world, one needed only theological explanations. As a result, Chaucer could have even the most secular of his Canterbury pilgrims use Christian beliefs in their tales; and the pilgrims themselves are implicitly judged according to their religious strengths and weaknesses. Alice the Wife of Bath humorously misapplies Biblical quotations to justify her five marriages; yet in the end, even as engaging and as memorable as she may be, there is the feeling that any medieval reader of The Canterbury Tales would know the moral condition (in Christian terms) of Alice's soul. Chaucer did not need to judge her; he could depend upon the predictable feelings of the Christian society for which he was writing.

Modern writers, who have no such theological or philosophical framework readily available, must organize their material along different lines. They cannot explain everything that occurs as some reflection of the will of God working in human society; instead, they most often use the social scientist's view of man as an organism subject to the complex demands of environment. Since writers can give no explanation other than to suggest the multitude of causes which precede a given act, they often fail to express a judgment.

One illustration of this approach is the modern tendency to write stories which are called slices of life, a designation which reflects their artificial character and nearly clinical detachment. Of course, an author may have carefully chosen an incident and may have organized the material so that it is artistically compressed, yet he attempts to avoid overtly stating his judgment of the incidents in the story. The reader is left to put his own interpretation upon the story. This is the situation which faces a reader of "The Use of Force" by William Carlos Williams. Williams presents a single incident, but avoids suggesting its significance; therefore, the reader has the task of deciding exactly what the story is suggesting.

A slightly different example of the complexity and ambiguity facing the reader of modern fiction is "Barn Burning" by William Faulkner. Though the story is told by an omniscient narrator, the events themselves are seen from the limited point of view of the boy, Colonel Sartoris Snopes. When the incidents become murky, the narrator is purposely reflecting the unconscious or jumbled feelings and thoughts of the boy and often comments that the boy will later in life see the incidents in a different light. In fact, the incidents will vary each time they are recalled because the boy himself will be a different person on each occasion. Therefore, the reality presented by the story is continually changing, just as the apparent reality of the world in any person's view is always changing.

The most extreme example in this unit of a complex view of the world is "The Sandbox" by Edward Albee. This play, a sample of the theatre of the absurd, presents Albee's view of the reality of modern American society. Of course, the reality is not the same as the theatrical realism of the late 19th century playwrights; instead, Albee chooses to speak through a strange mixture of surrealistic fantasy. If American society is absurdly sick--perhaps macabre in its insensitivity--Albee may indeed be justified in presenting a play which seems absurd. While the surface action may appear to be ridiculous, it presents a scathing indictment of the actions and thoughts beneath the surface reality of life. It is this attempt to present the hidden reality of our society which perhaps leads Albee to use scenes and incidents which we would not see in the real world of which we are a part. Also, the difficulties of interpretation of the play parallel the difficulties we face in understanding the actions and motives of other people, as well as ourselves. The result of Albee's technique is that it throws the entire burden of interpretation upon the reader (audience).

Though Albee's play is the most extreme example in this unit of a complex view of the world, there are other writers who have gone even further. For instance, James Joyce in Finnegans Wake attempts to portray the subconscious mental processes of the sleeping Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, a Scandinavian who keeps a pub in Dublin. In order to capture Earwicker's thoughts, Joyce invented a special language, which is wildly ungrammatical and is filled with neologisms. The result is that the book is almost unreadable, unless the reader has a knowledge of the personal and linguistic background of Joyce himself because Joyce wove himself into the novel. It is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that a full appreciation of Finnegans Wake could come only after years of study and preparation. Such works as Finnegans Wake suggest one of the final problems facing readers of difficult literature: how difficult may literature become before it becomes totally unreadable for even ideal readers? There is, of course, no answer in the abstract; instead, each individual reader must judge each literary work for himself. What the student should see is that since writers are continually striving to represent a complex world, the resulting works of literature may become extraordinarily difficult.

"The Use of Force" -- William Carlos Williams (Short Story Masterpieces, pp. 538-542)

1. What sort of distrust or uneasiness is present from the very opening of the story? How does this distrust affect the relationship between the doctor and Mathilda Olson?

2. Is the doctor for or against Mathilda? Could his feelings toward her be called mixed? Explain.

3. Why does the doctor finally resort to force in order to see Mathilda's throat? Does he do it only because he knows it is good for her? Explain.

4. What phrases or statements show that the doctor's reason or rational thought is almost replaced by animal emotion?

(1) 5. Could this story be called a "slice of life"? What does this designation imply about the content and the narrator's role in the story?

(2) 6. In what sense is this story realistic? How close would it be to a tape recording or a film version of the same incident?

(3) 7. In what ways does the narrator reveal his feelings and emotions? Does he ever reveal why he is telling the story?

8. What other incidents or situations might be suggested by this single example of "the use of force"? Do you think the narrator could have (or should have) introduced some of these by comparisons or allusions?

(4) 9. What demands does Williams' story make upon the reader? To what extent does an appreciation of it depend upon the active participation of the reader?

"Barn Burning" -- William Faulkner (Short Story Masterpieces, pp. 162-182)

1. How does Faulkner first establish the conflict in allegiance which disturbs the boy, Colonel Sartoris Snopes?

2. How does Faulkner convey the mental processes of Colonel Sartoris? -- Of course, the most evident technique is his use of the italicized sentences to represent Colonel Sartoris' exact thoughts. Faulkner also attempts to represent the unthinking, almost unconscious feelings by supplying, through the omniscient narrator, some of the vague feelings which are part of Colonel Sartoris' shadowy perception of the world. For example, on pages 163-4, the narrator explains that the boy's sense of time was frozen so that he felt "weightless in time." Another instance, on page 164, is the boy's complete absence of feeling during the fight; he even fails to taste the blood or feel the pain of the blows from the other boy. Perhaps the most important example of this technique is the last scene, when the boy warns Major De Spain and then flees into the night. Throughout the scene, the narrator relates the vague, almost jumbled thoughts of the boy, who did not have the time or the experience to sort out the incidents, even if he had had the courage to think about his betrayal of his own father.

(1) 3. Does the narrator ever reveal things which Colonel Sartoris did not realize, but which he would later be aware of? What does this technique tell you about the reality of the world, as seen through the eyes of the boy? -- It is important to note that the narrator is constantly stating that the boy would at later times in his life be aware of more implications of the incidents in the story. For example, on page 166, the narrator first remarks that Colonel Sartoris did not notice the strangely small fire his father kindled; then the narrator supplies three different explanations for the small fire, explanations which might only become clear to the boy the older and more mature he became. Thus, the reality seen by the boy is continually changing.

4. What sort of descriptive phrases and comparisons does the narrator use in describing Abner Snopes? What do these phrases tell you about Abner Snopes? about Colonel Sartoris' view of his father? -- While the students will be able to pick out the individual phrases, they should be led to see that the phrases stress the non-human, mechanical nature of Abner. Therefore, Abner is seen by Colonel Sartoris as a figure cut from a sheet of tin; this view perhaps represents the imperfect understanding which Colonel Sartoris has of his father's character.

After all, Colonel Sartoris knows little about his father and even refuses to think about some of the things he really does know.

5. How effectively does Faulkner capture the characters of the various members of the Snopes family? Explain.

6. Why does Abner Snopes seem to be compelled to lash out at Major De Spain? What does Abner have against Major De Spain?

(2) 7. Would you say that "Barn Burning" is more realistic than "The Use of Force"? Which story reflects more closely the incidents as they would have been seen by the main character of each?

(3) 8. Does "Barn Burning" make more demands upon the skill of a reader than did "The Use of Force"? Explain.

9. Why do you think Faulkner bothered to write this story? Is he writing only to entertain? Explain.

(4) 10. In what ways could Faulkner have conveyed the story in a more straight-forward and simple manner? What would he have gained or lost by writing a simpler story?

"The Sandbox" -- Edward Albee (Printed in the Student Version)

1. From the opening lines, what do you learn about the relationship between Mommy and Daddy?

2. What does the audience learn about the background of Grandma? What is the explanation for the way that Mommy and Daddy treat Grandma?

(1) 3. Do you think any of the characters speak in clichés? What is Albee suggesting by using clichés? -- Albee's view of American society is that much of the actual communication is dead and meaningless; thus, he parodies typical conversation by employing its clichés.

4. Do you find Albee's parody of the coming of Death grotesque or merely funny? Explain.

(2) 5. What is Albee suggesting by characterizing the Angel of Death as a young man who is continually exercising? -- Here, as elsewhere in this play, all sorts of interpretations are possible and probably justified. One possibility is that Albee is mocking the modern preoccupation with youth and the frantically absurd ways in which many people try to retain their youthful appearance. Another possibility is that the young man, with his muscular appearance and Hollywood pretensions, shows how deceptive many of the modern aspirations and goals really are; on one level people frantically consume life, only to discover Death in a form and a place where they are least likely to expect him.

(3) 6. What elements in the play are realistic? unrealistic? Why do you think Albee purposely chose to use the unrealistic elements? Assuming that one alternative open to Albee was a completely realistic play about the same situation, why do you think he chose the form of the play he did, rather than the realistic version? -- One possibility is that Albee is able to produce a more biting commentary on the American social scene through his use of the unreal. Once the audience sees that he is not dealing in strict reality, they aesthetically agree not to take the play as realistic. This means that they agree to play Albee's game -- to try to find out what his characters and scenes stand for or symbolize. In a realistic version, Albee could not present the full horror because if he went beyond the boundaries of reasonable action, the audience would object that he was not being realistic and would cease to apply the play to their own ordinary lives. As it is, Albee avoids the criticism of unconvincing reality by demanding that his audience work to interpret the unreal play he has written.

(4) 7. How difficult do you find this play? Do you think an audience would have difficulty appreciating it? What are the advantages and disadvantages of reading this play rather than seeing it?

8. What is the effect of the humor within the play? Do you think the humor serves to heighten the effect of the grim elements of the play?

9. One objection to much of 19th century drama is that it fails to involve the audience. In what ways has Albee purposely recognized the presence of the audience? How does this recognition affect the audience?

(5) 10. Would you like to see other even more difficult examples of plays from the "theatre of the absurd"? Explain.

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DIFFICULT LITERATURE: A READER'S VIEW

Literature Curriculum VI
Student Version

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Something New, Something Old

INTRODUCTION

Old cigar boxes or broken pieces of ancient Greek pottery are sometimes interesting whether or not they are beautiful, artistic, or well made. They are curiosities, or show us something about the way people lived in another time. But we do not keep reading old plays, poems, stories, just because they are old curiosities.

Much writing has not survived through the ages simply because it was not worth reading a second time, or because it was only of interest to people of the time when it was written. That which has survived has passed the test of time, of centuries, more or less, of readers, critics, audiences. This does not mean we are to revere old literature as if it were perfect, above criticism; but chances are that which survives is better than average, and often it is excellent.

We might say that old works have been pre-tested for us. But there is another reason we read them, and this has to do with what is in the work itself. In literature, old and new, we find an expression of our common human experience. It may be both comforting and startling to find feelings we have had, doubts, conflicts, joys, in a story or poem by someone who died centuries before our time.

Read the following poem and see what Housman says on this subject.

(For text, see "On Wenlock Edge" by A. E. Housman from The Rinehart Book of Verse, ed. by Alan Swallow; Holt, Rinehart & Winston Co., Inc., New York; pp. 321-322.)

1. What relation does Housman see between the "Roman and his troubles" and himself? What does he, the author, have in common with the Roman?

2. "The tree of man was never quiet." This might be the central statement of the poem. What does it imply? What is the thread of continuity that links the old and the new?

3. How much can you tell about how the speaker feels about his own troubles?

Why some things survive and others do not is not always easy to determine. Technical proficiency is one part of the answer, but subject matter, or theme, is also a central question. A satire on a local club might be funny to people who know the situation, but unless the satire is well done, and also shows something recognizable, important, and true about human nature, it would not be entertaining to someone in the next town, or to someone who joins the club a year later.

As you read the works in this unit, look for the themes or ideas which seem to belong to more than just one time or place. How is the Chinese father, in "Putting the Blame On His Sons," like fathers you know? How might a modern "draft card burner" or demonstrator for some cause see himself or his own problem in Antigone or Darkness at Noon?

The selections have been divided into groups which show different treatments at different times of the same themes. But there is no clear-cut division between what is old and what is new. The biblical story of David and Absalom, for example, would have been old to the writer of the Anglo-Saxon poem "The Seafarer." We call Conrad a modern writer, and yet he was born over a hundred years ago. What the works do represent is a continual recurrence, again and again through centuries, of similar human concerns. As you read, therefore, look beyond the outward differences in custom, language, and culture, and search for the lasting similarities in human character, thought, emotion.

Part One: Youth and Age

(For text, see "The Seafarer" from Old English Poetry, translated by J. Duncan Spaeth; Princeton University Press, 1922; pp. 144-146.)

"The Seafarer," an Anglo-Saxon poem of unknown date and authorship, was probably written during the eighth century. It is usually considered to be a dialogue between an old man, who has been to sea, and a young man, who wants to go to sea. When you answer the following questions, point out specific lines and words in the work to support what you say.

1. Why is the youth so eager to go to sea? Do the words of the old man affect his feelings in any way?
2. What is the difference between the two viewpoints? Is it the difference between experience and inexperience? Reality and imagination? Youth and age?
3. How does the poet strengthen what he says by the use of description? Again, try to see the division between ideas. What sort of description predominates in the words of the old man? What sort in the words of the young man? How do they make you feel the emotions they are talking about: loneliness, estrangement, longing, restlessness?

Does the sailor, young or old, seem to become part of the landscape of the sea? For example, why does the old man say that he had, instead of human laughter to keep him company, the sounds of seabirds instead?

Youth

by Joseph Conrad

(For text, see Three Short Novels by Joseph Conrad; Bantam Books, New York, 1960; p. 95.)

At the end of Youth, Conrad's narrator says, "Youth and the sea. Glamour and the sea! The good, strong sea, the salt, bitter sea, that could whisper to you and roar at you and knock your breath out of you. . . . By all that's wonderful it is the sea, I believe, the sea itself--or is it youth alone?"

What is Marlow talking about? How does Conrad answer this question in Youth? When you answer this question, you will be talking about the central theme of the book itself. For your answer, draw also on "The Seafarer" and show how that poem and this short novel are similar in theme.

This question could lead you into a very thorough discussion of the whole story; however, you may want to consider some of the following questions first, and return to discuss the above quotation.

1. Why do you think Conrad has the story told by a narrator? Do you think he wants us to remember, throughtout the story, that this tale is being told by Marlow to a group of men drinking claret around a mahogany table? What lines in the story support your opinion?

2. What is the contrast between the men listening to Marlow's tale, and the men in the tale itself? How are they all the same? What line near the beginning of the story characterizes the relationship of these men to the sea?

3. Do you think Conrad could have made just about the same statement about life as he does here if he had written about a young man traveling into the mountains, or setting out to find a job in the city? How or how not?

4. At one point, Conrad describes the sea during a storm: "The world was nothing but an immensity of great foaming waves rushing at us, under a sky low enough to touch with the hand and dirty like a smoked ceiling." In this picture, we see that the sea becomes the whole world, for the sailor. It is a hostile world in a storm, for the waves rush at them. The sailor is close to the sea, for it comes in all around him, like a low ceiling. It hems him in. In that same paragraph, Conrad writes, "there was as much flying spray as air." The sea becomes something they not only see, fight, hear, feel, but breathe as well.

Look for five or six other examples of description of the sea, or the life at sea, which give something more than just images or description for the sake of atmosphere. In other words, try to see how Conrad uses description to tell his story and to express his ideas, and point to examples.

Why is description of the setting particularly important in this story?

When Marlow asks whether it is the sea or youth which is so exciting, he too is questioning the nature of those universals which are fresh in every generation. There is really a great deal of similarity between the thoughts and feelings expressed in "The Seafarer" and those in Youth. But each work still is unique and has made the old theme new in a sense. Two subjects, the sea and youth, appear in these works and many others. Words and words have been written about waves, gulls, ocean storms. If it is true that the subject itself seems inexhaustible, new for everyone who encounters the sea for the first time, and that most people are stirred to similar feelings of awe, adventure, and romance about the sea, it is not enough for the writer to go on repeating the same thing in the same old way.

You will talk about the problem of freshness in writing later this year. But it is also important here to see how writers can deal with the same themes over and over without wearing them out. Giving the material a personal and unique interpretation is one way of making it new again. Rendering it in such strong and specific language that it becomes exciting is another way.

Write a short essay on your own feelings about the sea. Try to make it appeal to the common feelings that we all have, but make it something different as well, something that you feel personally. Have you ever been out on the ocean in a boat? Can you remember the first time you saw the ocean? Perhaps you have lived at the coast, or perhaps you have lived inland and have formed an imagined picture of what the sea is like. Have you ever seen a coastal storm? Was it frightening, exciting, strange? Does the sea seem like a rich storehouse of wealth, or like a hostile waste? Don't try to tell everything you might feel about the subject. Find some particular thing, and write about that.

"Fern Hill"
by Dylan Thomas

(For text, see Immortal Poems, p. 615)

Here, a poet looks backward to the days of his childhood and his farm home. How does Thomas see his youth?

At the end of the poem he says, "Time held me green and dying/Though I sang in my chains like the sea." Is "Time" a personification in the poem? What does time do to the boy? How does time alter the "lamb white days?" Why is the boy both "green and dying?" What are his "chains?" Why does he sing, although he is "dying" and enchained? How does Thomas picture the child? Is heedless joy common to the young?

Part Two: The Nativity, Christian Tradition

(For text, see "The Second Shepherd's Play" from Representative Medieval and Tudor Plays, translated and edited by Henry W. Wells and Roger S. Loomis, copyright 1942 Sheed & Ward, Inc., New York.)

"The Second Shepherd's Play" was one of a cycle of medieval plays, generally performed out of doors, to popular crowds, on a moveable stage or sort of wagon. These "mystery plays" were generally based on the Bible, both Old and New Testament. As you read this play, remember that English drama had its roots in the church, that it was meant not only to entertain but also to instruct. Also remember that this play was not intended for a select group of intellectuals, or as light entertainment for the upper classes. It represents perhaps what we call today "mass media." But neither is the play written down, or condescending. It appeals to all men, and is a fine blending of comedy, entertainment, instruction, and representation of human nature.

1. How would you describe the character of Mak? Of his wife? Are they villains? Are they evil or good, or mainly just human? What are some reasons that we, along with the shepherds, are not too hard on Mak, the thief?

2. Each shepherd, in his first lines in the play, speaks on some hardship of his life. What is the subject of each shepherd's speech? How would the audience, perhaps, have seen its own troubles in the shepherds'? Is the treatment here of life's hardships light rather than serious?

3. How does the farce of Mak and his wife trying to pass off the sheep as their newborn son prepare for the theme of Christ's nativity? Can you see how this is like the shepherds, after they have heard the angels singing, trying to sing the same song but singing off-key? List all the ways in which the farce prepares for the serious final scene. Does the comedy prepare the audience to listen to the more serious message of the play? Does it tell something about the nature of men, whom Christ has come to redeem?

4. Why do the shepherds, instead of hanging Mak, merely toss him around in a blanket? One shepherd says that it is best to forget what has happened. How does this underline the message of the play?

"Journey of the Magi"
by T. S. Eliot

(For text, see Immortal Poems, p. 537)

In "The Second Shepherd's Play", the nativity changed things for the shepherds and for all men. The play ends with their going out joyfully to tell the news. Eliot's poem too deals with change, the difference that has been made in the life of the wise man who speaks the poem.

1. How do both these works bring the subject to a comprehensible human level? For instance, what do the "silken girls" and the "camel men cursing" add to this poem? How does the man's statement "A hard time we had of it" strengthen the poem?

2. Why does the speaker ask, "were we led all that way for/Birth or Death?" How many kinds of birth and death are talked about in the poem?

3. Do you recognize any symbols in stanza two? How do the "three trees" and the hands "dicing for pieces of silver" support the idea that death was inherent in the birth?

4. What are some ways that this poem is like the medieval play in content? How does each treat similar ideas differently?

"The Second Coming"

by William Butler Yeats

(For text, see Immortal Poems, p. 489)

This poem also uses Christian tradition. Yeats is very much aware of the influence of Christianity and the Nativity on the past two thousand years. But he is not writing about the birth of Christ itself. Instead he uses it as a point of historical reference, a way of describing the era in which we live, and to evoke certain feelings about great changes that affect the course of history and human society. Yeats uses many references in his poetry, to Christianity, to Greek mythology, to history, to Irish folklore and life. He also makes reference to his own private conception of history, a kind of private mythology, and sees history as a kind of circular motion, of cycles moving inward and outward and marked by great events. But you do not need to know all about Yeats' theories to understand this poem. It is enough, perhaps, to say that the "gyre" in the first line is the word Yeats most often uses to describe this circular, cyclic movement of events.

1. Read the first stanza. What sort of times seem to be described? Without saying that Yeats was describing any particular event, what sort of things, natural, political, or social, might be described in the terms he uses?

2. Do you think Yeats is actually talking about the "Second Coming" of Christ? Why does he say "That twenty centuries of stony sleep/Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle"?

3. Why does he end the poem with a question rather than a statement? Is Yeats actually predicting some terrible catastrophe, or is he depicting the mood of certain times, times when, for example, men are troubled by the way things are going in the world?

4. What contrast does Yeats make between the nativity of Christ and "The Second Coming?"

Part Three: Conflict of Generations

In part one of this unit, we looked at the way in which some writers have treated the theme of youth and age. Children grow up and are children no longer; adults look back on their own lives and realize how time and experience have changed them. So too do parents, once children themselves, see their own children grow from the dependence of childhood to find their own lives in the adult world. It is as natural for the child to rebel as it is for him suddenly to find himself, so to speak, on the side of law and order, with even younger rebels at his heels.

The selections in this part show various aspects of this conflict between generations. A boy finds that he must leave home to retain his new found hold on manhood. A son pursues rebellion to the point of tragic death. Idealistic young people, who cannot understand or accept the imperfection of their fathers, realize too late where men's weaknesses may lead them. And an aging father, feeling that his sons are either too frivolous or incompetent to do anything he considers worthwhile, wonders what has been the use of all he has done to bring them up properly.

The selections range from an Old Testament narrative, and an early Chinese poem, to a contemporary short story and a play. And yet you will find many similarities between the ideas expressed, which deal not only with the conflicts between different generations, but also things such as the effect of war on a generation, the conflicts of love and hate, the striving for individuality.

"Soldier's Home"
by Ernest Hemingway

(For text see Short Story Masterpieces, p. 207)

The main thing you will want to decide about this story is why Krebs leaves his parents' home. First, however, ask yourself why he came back in the first place. Does Krebs seem like a rebellious sort of person? What lines in the story describe Krebs as either a conservative or a rebel? Why did he like the war, or rather, why did he feel good about his life during the war?

Krebs loved to play pool. He thought his baseball playing sister was his best sister. In the evenings he practiced playing his clarinet. Do these things explain in any way why he decides to leave home?

Krebs' mother persuades his father to let him use the car in the evenings. Does this show that his parents now regard him as an adult?

How does Krebs' mother justify her concern for him?

Explain the significance of the following lines from the story:

1. "The Rhine does not show in the picture."

2. "the times so long back when he had done the one thing, the only thing for a man to do, easily and naturally, when he might have done something else, now lost their cool, valuable quality and then were lost themselves."

3. "He did not want any consequences. He did not want any consequences ever again."

4. "He liked the pattern. It was exciting."

5. "He had felt sorry for his mother and she had made him lie."

"Putting the Blame on His Sons"

(For text, see "Putting the Blame on His Sons" by T'ao Ch'ien from Anthology of Chinese Literature: From early times to the fourteeth century; ed Cyril Birch; Grove Press, Inc., New York, 1965; p. 187.)

Clearly this father is dissatisfied with his sons. Might we guess that the sons also are dissatisfied with their father? What really does he want from them? Does he want them to be like himself? Does he seem to expect too much from them? What is added to the poem by his giving their specific ages? Do the sons really seem to be a bunch of "no-goods"? What does the father seem to mean in the last lines of the poem? Does he seem to be exaggerating?

Compare the expectations of the father in this poem with those of Krebs' father in the Hemingway story. What reasons for the misunderstanding between generations do these two works seem to have in common?

"David and Absalom"

(For text, see Narratives from the Old Testament; ed. James F. Fullington; Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., New York, 1950; pp. 102-113.)

Since the Old Testament is, among other things, an objective historical record, it is rather difficult to know just where to begin an excerpt. We are concerned here with the revolt of Absalom against his father, King David. The events which caused the revolt are as follows:

Amnon, the first-born son of King David, has forced Tamar, the sister of Absalom. Absalom and Tamar were also children of David, but by another mother. Absalom waits two years for his revenge, and then has Amnon killed. Absalom then flees into exile. He finally is recalled from exile, but David will not see him. Finally Absalom forces a meeting and a reconciliation. Using this reconciliation to conceal his real plans, he begins plotting a rebellion. It is at this point that we pick up the narrative.

We may assume that the writer of this account intended it to be a record of events. Besides simply being a narrative, in which things happen with great apparent rapidity and sometimes without predictable sequence, some lesson may be set forth here, which explains the various happenings as parts of a whole. Why does Absalom fail? Why is he in the wrong and David in the right? Ask yourself why it is right, artistically and within the moral context of the narrative, both that David ask his captains not to hurt Absalom, and that they do kill him. In very economical terms, the writer gives a good picture of the character of both David and his son. Characterize each, briefly, and refer to specific information in the story. How are David and Absalom different? Would you have expected David to seek revenge on his rebellious son?

1. Why does Joab tell David that his weeping for his son has shamed all of his subjects?

2. Why does David not have Shimei, who had reviled him when he fled, put to death?

3. How does the account of Mephibosheth, at the end of the narrative, parallel the theme of the story? In what way does Mephibosheth take the place of Absalom?

"All My Sons"
by Arthur Miller

(For text see Six Great Modern Plays, p. 355.)

As you read this play, remember that in drama the author must give all necessary information through the speech of his characters. Very little is presented in stage directions or author's notes. Moreover, though the time of the play itself is relatively short, there is a great deal in the past of the characters which is important. How the author brings this past into the present; what information which characters give and when; these are things you will need to notice, as well as the plot and background information itself.

The most important thing you will want to discuss is the character of Joe Keller. What is he like? How do we learn that he has been in jail? How does our opinion of him change? Who tells us the exact details of the crime? Who tells us, finally, of his guilt?

Complementary to the character of Joe is that of his son, Chris. How does Chris change during the play? Is he at fault, in any way? How does the knowledge of the audience parallel that of Chris?

Before you offer complete answers to these questions, consider some of the following:

1. Why does Kate Keller insist that her son, Larry, is not dead?

2. Why does the past, which seemed to be settled, come back again and set off the chain of events in the play?

3. Of what might Larry's tree be a symbol? Cite specific things which are said about the tree.

4. Why does Keller pretend, to the neighborhood children, to have a jail in his basement? Is this symbolic in any way?

5. Why does George leave without doing anything concrete about Keller's crime?

6. Is Chris really ignorant of his father's crime?

7. What is the function of the minor characters in the play? For example, what purpose does Frank's dabbling in astrology have?

8. Why does Keller shoot himself?

9. Why does Kate tell her son, Chris, in the end, not to take the guilt on himself, to let things end?

10. How are all the members of the younger generation in the play different from their parents? Why do you think they are different?

Suggestions for Writing

1. Write a short essay in which you pretend to be your own parents talking about you.

2. Write a short essay in which you talk about the oddities, apparent failings of, or differences between someone your age and those younger than you--the freshmen or sophomores for example, or a younger brother or sister.

Part Four: The Individual in Conflict with Society

We are all both individuals and at the same time members of different groups. We are individuals, yet members of a family. We are individuals, yet members of a generation. We are individuals, yet we identify with a particular group of friends, or fellow workers, or a church, club, or neighborhood. To some extent our interests are those of the groups we belong to, but in the midst of others the unique "I" out of which we view the world says this is what _I_ believe, this is what _I_ need, this is what _I_ am going to do. Sometimes this is easy. But sometimes it is much easier to go along with the group. Then _I_ must choose--to do what _I_ believe _I_ should, regardless of consequences.

Just as the child may find himself in conflict with the family, the individual may find himself in conflict with society. Ideally, social and political institutions are established for the good of the members. But society is rarely perfect. When the "I" says, something is wrong here, he must decide whether he should take his stand, or would be doing better to ignore the imperfections for the sake of the whole thing. When he finds fault with his society's actions in some way, he must decide whether protest is necessary or whether it would do damage to the good things in the society as well as the bad.

In Antigone, just such an opposition is presented. Though the girl, Antigone, is resolute in her decision to oppose the state, the head of that state, Creon, also begins with a reason for denying her protest. In Darkness at Noon, the individual, Rubashov, finds the conflict as much within himself as between himself and the state. For he has helped set in motion the machinery which finally destroys him.

As you read the following selections, try to see how these problems, which appear throughout time and in all countries, might be seen in situations with which you are familiar. What about modern "draft card burners?" What about a citizens' committee opposing the City Council's move to widen a street through a residential neighborhood and cut down all the trees? It is not only in political matters that the individual may come in conflict with society, but in matters of dress, length of hair, or whether or not he wants to keep goats in his backyard. The problem is as recurrent in literature as it is in life, for literature of lasting interest reflects just such human concerns.

Antigone

(For text, see Antigone , translated and edited by Peter D. Arnott, Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., New York, 1960; p. 57.)

Sophocles was not concerned with presenting a naturalistic picture of life, as we see in "All My Sons." Perhaps his intentions as a dramatist come closer to those of "The Second Shepherd's Play," for he too is treating material, with which the audience would have been familiar, with a new interpretation or rendering. But there is none of the earthy touch of the crowd in this play, which is so apparent in the medieval drama. But such differences reflect styles, and individual dramatic conceptions, timely ideas of what is best and proper. As you read Antigone , look beyond the characteristics of the play which place it in a distant past, and find the lasting themes which are as much our concern today as in Sophocles' time.

1. What reason does each of the following give, at his first appearance in the play, for the moral position he takes?
    a. Antigone, when Ismene tells her what she does is madness.
    b. Ismene, when Antigone tells her she is in the wrong.
    c. Creon, in his first long speech.
    d. The sentry, after he brings Antigone in as the culprit.
    e. Haemon at his first appearance.
    f. Creon advising his son at this first meeting ("Accept your father's word as law...." etc.)

   g. Haemon and Creon when they argue.
   h. Teiresias in his long speech to Creon ("You will know, when you hear...." etc.)
   i. The chorus in the final lines of the play.

2. Creon begins by stating his good intentions, to set his state in order. How can we tell which side the author favors, Antigone's or Creon's?

3. What is Creon's chief fault?

4. Briefly define the role of the chorus in this play. Cite examples of lines spoken by the chorus to illustrate.

5. Perhaps the bitter quarrel between Creon and his son is the most psychologically realistic scene in the play. Creon's manner degenerates from self-assured fatherliness, to illogical ranting, threats, and indecision. Haemon is torn between wanting to respect his father and yet not respecting him: "If you were not my father, I should call you a fool." Creon, enraged and disgusted with his son, tries to shame him with words of derision: "You woman's slave; do not try to wheedle me!" Clearly this too illustrates the theme of conflict between generations. How does the figure of Haemon in this play parallel that of Chris in "All My Sons"?

6. How do we feel about Creon at the end of the play?

Darkness at Noon

by Arthur Koestler

(For text, see Signet Classic #CP279,
The New American Library, New York)

The most important question you will need to answer about this novel is, of what crime is Rubashov guilty; why must he be executed? You will need to decide if the state's reason for sentencing Rubashov is the true one, and in how many ways Rubashov is guilty or innocent. Before answering this question, however, consider the following:

1. During the actual time of the novel the protagonist is imprisoned and has very little opportunity for human contact, or conversation. How, then, does the author provide action in the novel?

2. What does each of the following tell us about Rubashov? The man in 402. Hare-lip. Bogrov. Arlova. The old man who taps out ARIE YE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH. Richard.

3. What is the meaning of the "grammatical fiction?"

4. How does Rubashov's diary reflect the progress of the novel?

5. Why is Ivanov executed?

6. Compare Rubashov to Creon as an instigator of his own doom.

7. What is the problem which Rubashov wrestles with again and again but cannot satisfy logically? Why does he say, "But I have had enough of this kind of logic. I am tired and I don't want to play this game any more." Why does he say, "Perhaps it was not suitable to think every thought to its logical conclusion." What does "logical" mean to Rubashov? What are the practical, personal consequences of Rubashov's "logic" for him?

Student Version

DIFFICULT LITERATURE: A READER'S VIEW

I. Introductory Discussion

This unit focuses on one question frequently posed by readers: "Why is the best literature always so hard?" Of course, even in asking the question, a reader makes certain assumptions. The main one is that it is possible to define and to illustrate what is meant by the "best literature." It would be nice to have an objective test of the worth of literature, but such is not the case. One man may say that Joseph Conrad's Lord Jim is the best novel in English; another may say that Thomas Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles is the best. Which man is right really doesn't matter because the important fact is that most mature readers will rank both books high in any listing of the outstanding English novels.

Here, then, is the rub--"most mature readers." No wonder students sometimes fail to see what is so wonderful about certain books which appear on lists of recommended reading. If all students were mature readers, they wouldn't be students. As a matter of fact, the phrase "most mature readers" is limited in another and more subtle way. The stipulation that the best literature is chosen by readers excludes those people who have never bothered to read widely. They may have enjoyed movies or television, and they may be quite mature and sensitive, yet if they haven't read widely, they will not be well prepared to judge a literary work. The result is that the phrase "most mature readers" really includes no more than perhaps thirty percent of the population.

Such a limited standard is not as snobbish or as selective as it may appear. What is often forgotten is that reading is an art. Since the people comprising this thirty percent have cultivated and practiced the art of reading, they have developed tastes which allow them to say that Conrad's fairly difficult Lord Jim is one of the best English novels. Their first experience with a novel was probably not with one as complex as Lord Jim, nor did they all necessarily like Lord Jim the first time they tried to read it. Yet at some point they were sufficiently able to draw upon their personal experience and reading sophistication that they discovered the emotions and insights in Conrad's novel. As with so many human endeavors, the rewards of reading are proportional to what the reader has to offer.

Since you alone experience the enjoyment and pleasure in any literary work, only you can decide what is the best literature for you. Therefore, the chief goal of this unit is to explore one area--literary difficulty--which should influence your decisions about literature. The first problem will be to isolate the main reasons why you or any reader finds literature difficult. Once this has been accomplished, then the crucial and more elusive consideration will be to evaluate the various justifications for literary difficulties. It is easy enough to say that a poem by E. E. Cummings is difficult because he distorts the normal patterns of language, but it is far from easy to decide if Cummings had a reasonable justification for the difficulties which readers may have with his poem.

Since supplying justifications for difficulties is so subjective and elusive, the readings in this unit are organized to explore the main reasons why you may find literature difficult. This organization assumes that literature is a form of communication: that through a literary work the writer conveys his view of the world to each reader. With this assumption as a basis, it is possible to isolate the various sources of difficulty. First, literature may be difficult because the reader is unfamiliar with the historical or cultural era of the author. Second, the author may purposely create difficult literature. And third, the world of human experience is so complex and puzzling that the literary work which accurately portrays the world may be complex and puzzling.

Just as it is easy to list these broad categories of difficulty, some of the following selections and discussion questions may appear to be self-evident. But they won't be self-evident if you try to justify difficult literature in the light of your own personal enjoyment and taste. There are no ready-made answers about how difficult literature can or should be. In fact, this unit will be successful if it merely suggests some of the questions you should ask about difficult literature. In the end, only you can decide which book--difficult or easy--will reward your time and effort.

II. Introductory Selection: "You Could Look It Up" --

James Thurber (Short Story Masterpieces, pp. 508-524)

1. Do the peculiar spellings in this story make it difficult to read? What conclusions can you draw about how much modern readers depend on standard spelling?

2. Do you recognize the names of any of the baseball players Thurber mentions? Do you think any of them existed? How would the story be different if many of them were actual players and you recognized them? Why do many writers insert as many real details as possible into an imaginary or far-fetched story? Explain.

3. Are any of the slang phrases puzzling or dated? What effect does the dated slang have on the story?

4. What traits or background would a reader have to have in order to appreciate fully Thurber's story? Do you think any single reader would be prepared for the story, or is Thurber himself the only one who would know everything about the story?

5. How difficult would Thurber's story be for a non-American reader? What specific items of information would he lack which any American reader would automatically have available?

6. How would you define difficulty (as applied to a literary work)? In what ways is it relative? Using Thurber's story, would you say that difficulty is best defined in terms of the reader?

III. *Historical Distance: Changes in Language*

"Sumer Is Icumen In" -- Anonymous (*Immortal Poems*, p. 14)

1. Are the Middle English spellings of current Modern English words greatly different? How difficult are they to read?

2. Since the spellings of Middle English words differ from those of Modern English forms, what do you imagine is true about the pronunciation of Middle English as compared with Modern English?

I Corinthians 13: Two Translations

King James Translation (1611)

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become *as* sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

2 And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

4 Charity suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.

5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

8 Charity never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, they shall fail; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall vanish away.

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these _is_ charity.

Phillips Translation (1947)

(For text, see Translation of I Chorinthians 13 from _The New Testament in Modern English_ by J. B. Phillips; Macmillan Co., New York, 1958.)

QUESTIONS

1. What does the King James Version say is the highest of virtues? What does the Phillips Version say is the highest of virtues? Judging from their contexts, do both of these words stand for the same idea? See if you can define the concept being talked about.

2. If you saw the word charity without any context or even a clue as to its meaning, how would you probably define it? Would you feel that most people would like to be the recipients of charity? What sort of unpleasant overtones does the word seem to have?

3. From the preceding questions, what would you guess about the historical changes in the meaning of the word charity?

4. One of the most famous verses in the King James Version is verse 12. Why do you think it has often been quoted? Would you say that "darkly" is in common use nowadays or is it a poetical usage?

5. What image or comparison does the Phillips Version use instead of saying "through a glass darkly"? Is the basic meaning the same in each translation? Though we can't say anything about the relative accuracy of the two versions as translations, which one do you think is clearer in meaning? more effective? Explain.

6. Which translation is the better of the two? What criteria are you using in formulating your answer? Defend your decision.

"The Seven Ages of Man" -- William Shakespeare (Immortal Poems, p. 73)

1. Which words in this speech are either unknown or puzzling?

2. Do you find any examples of word order which is a little unusual or strange? Does the word order seem to make the speech harder for you to read?

3. What reasons can you suggest for the popularity of this speech, usually considered one of the gems of Shakespeare's creation?

4. What do you think about the quality of this speech? What criteria are you using to judge it?

IV. Cultural Distance

"I Sing of a Maiden" -- Anonymous (Immortal Poems, p. 14)

1. Assuming that the spelling of this poem has not been modernized, how would you date it? Compare both its spelling and the frequency of archaic words with "Sumer Is Icumen In" and Shakespeare's "The Seven Ages of Man."

2. Would you say that this poem presents an idealized picture of Christ and the Virgin Mary? Explain.

3. Would you say that the poem was best characterized as simple or as complex? Does its simplicity increase or decrease the amount of reverence which the poet seems to be conveying? Explain.

4. If somebody 400 years in the future made an anthology of twentieth century poetry, would he be likely to include many poems about Christ and the Virgin Mary?

"Ballad of the Goodly Fere" -- Ezra Pound (Immortal Poems, pp. 526-7)

1. In lines such as 7-8 and 11-12, how mild-tempered is Pound's Christ in comparison with the Biblical version? Why does Pound make Christ different from the Biblical version?

2. Where else in the poem is there an ironic gap between the usual picture of Christ (based on the Bible) and Pound's statements about Christ?

3. Why does Pound draw the ironic picture of Christ which emerges from this poem? How do you think Pound expected his audience to react? How many of you reacted in this fashion? Explain.

V. Personal Connotations

"Sonnet to My Mother" -- George Barker (Immortal Poems, p. 601)

1. Who was Rabelais? What associations is Barker probably expecting to awaken with his mention of Rabelais?

2. Taking into account the references to his mother's size, to the gin in her hand, and to her Rabelaisian spirit, would you say that Barker is essentially complimentary? Explain.

3. How many people would see their mothers in this very same set of images? Do you imagine that if Barker had sisters or brothers, they

would see the mother in the same light as Barker himself does?

4. If a person had never known his mother, or had been mistreated by his mother, what associations would come to his mind when the word mother occurred? How successful would such a person be in his reading of Barker's poem?

5. What sort of personal associations do you see as possible with such common words as dog, chair, Cuba (consider its connotations in 1950 and at the present time), baseball, or spinach? Upon what sort of evidence or experience do your associations for these words depend?

6. If a writer used such words as you examined in the previous question, could he be certain that his readers would receive the same images or associations which he intended? Does this tell you anything about why a literary work is not always easy to talk about and why people differ in their responses?

VI. Author Originality: Modern Poetry

"Pied Beauty" -- Gerard Manley Hopkins (*Immortal Poems*, pp. 458-9)

1. What is the scene pictured in the first half of the fourth line?

2. What ambiguity is possible if the word "couple" in the second line is considered first as a noun (meaning two) and then as a verb (meaning to pair up or to connect)? What sort of sky is being described?

3. Since the word "pied" in the title introduces the idea of contrast, how many other contrasting images or traits appear in the poem?

4. What is the term for the repeated use in line 4 of "f" as the opening sound of words?

5. Where else in the poem do you note examples of alliteration? What reason can you give for Hopkins' extensive use of alliteration?

6. What aspects of this poem did you find to be most difficult? How much of the difficulty would you credit to the poetical devices used by Hopkins and how much to deficiencies in your own background?

7. If Hopkins had wanted to praise God and His creation, why didn't he just say what he had to say without all the images of "chestnut-falls" and the "finches wings"?

8. Would you say that Hopkins' poem is worth reading? What elements and considerations must you consider if you are really fair about answering this question?

"The Yachts" -- William Carlos Williams (Immortal Poems, pp. 521-2)

1. Do you find any of Williams' phrases describing the yachts and the sea particularly vivid or effective? Explain.

2. What does the ghastly scene at the end suggest about what the yachts themselves represent?

3. Did you find anything about this poem difficult? Would reading it be just as easy as reading a prose summary of the same idea?

4. Do you think Williams' poem is a better one than Hopkins' "Pied Beauty"? Upon what considerations are you basing your answer? If you had to choose between a book of poems by either Williams or Hopkins, which poet would you choose?

"The Bloody Sire" -- Robinson Jeffers (Immortal Poems, p. 531)

1. Suppose someone stated: "War and violence have been positive factors in the orderly growth of nature and in the progress of human society." Why isn't this just as good as Jeffers' statement of a similar idea? Do you think the meaning of a poem can be reduced to a few sentences? Explain.

2. Probably you found this poem to be a good deal easier than either "Pied Beauty" or "The Yachts." What does this say about you? about the poem?

3. In what way would the effectiveness of this poem vary with the background of the person reading it? To what extent would personal connotations affect the reader's response to it?

"Neither Here nor There" -- W.R. Rodgers (Immortal Poems, pp. 591-2)

1. Would the phrase "no locked ponds / Of settled purpose" appear in normal spoken English? In what way is it poetical? If you used a transformational grammar of Standard American English, could you generate such a phrase? In other words, in what respect is this phrase exceptional? Can you find other examples of such phrases?

2. Were you able to explain all of the concrete references made by Rodgers to the physical characteristics of the land? If you had difficulty with some of them, would you say that it was because you didn't see what Rodgers intended, or was it because Rodgers purposely inserted multiple meanings and implications?

3. Since the poet is clearly giving only a description of "neither here nor there," do you think that it would be sufficient to give only the

title? After all, we all can supply the dreamy, passionless connotations which reside in the phrase "neither here nor there." What, then, do you see as the role of the poet or writer?

"What If a Much of a Which of a Wind" -- E.E. Cummings (Immortal Poems p. 555)

1. How would you interpret the first two lines? What does Cummings do which complicates the problem of interpretation?

2. What principle has Cummings used in organizing the content of this poem? Does he depend upon the traditional elements of meter or rhyme? Do you detect a common stanzaic pattern?

3. Where in this poem has Cummings most strikingly violated the normal syntax of English? Why do you think Cummings chose to use his words in this fashion?

4. Why does Cummings ignore the conventions of punctuation and capitalization? What difference does it make how a poem is printed on a page?

5. In what respect is it possible to specify the meaning of Cummings' poem? What would be lost if the poem were to be summarized in a couple of sentences? Is there any basis for saying that the poem is virtually a living, breathing object?

6. What in Cummings' poem causes the most difficulty for a reader? On what grounds can you justify the difficulties which Cummings purposely includes in the poem?

VII A Complex World

"The Use of Force" -- William Carlos Williams (Short Story Masterpieces, pp. 538-42)

1. Could this story be called a "slice of life"? What does this designation imply about the content and the narrator's role in the story?

2. In what sense is this story realistic? How close would it be to a tape recording or a film version of the same incident?

3. In what ways does the narrator reveal his feelings and emotions? Does he ever reveal why he is telling the story?

4. What demands does Williams' story make upon the reader? To what extent does an appreciation of it depend upon the active participation of the reader?

"Barn Burning"---William Faulkner (Short Story Masterpieces, pp. 162-182.)

1. Does the narrator ever reveal things which Colonel Sartoris did not realize, but which he would later be aware of? What does this technique tell you about the reality of the world, as seen through the eyes of the boy?

2. Would you say that "Barn Burning" is more a realistic than "The Use of Force"? Which story reflects more closely the incidents as they would have been seen by the main character of each?

3. Does "Barn Burning" make more demands upon the skill of a reader than did "The Use of Force"? Explain.

4. In what ways could Faulkner have conveyed the story in a more straight-forward and simple manner? What would he have gained or lost by writing a simpler story?

"The Sandbox"

(For text, see The Zoo Story, The Death of Bessie Smith, The Sandbox; by Edward Albee, Coward-McCann, Inc., New York, copyright 1960.)

QUESTIONS

1. Do you think any of the characters speak in clichés? What is Albee suggesting by using clichés?

2. What is Albee suggesting by characterizing the Angel of Death as a young man who is continually exercising?

3. What elements in the play are realistic? unrealistic? Why do you think Albee purposely chose to use the unrealistic elements? Assuming that one alternative open to Albee was a completely realistic play about the same situation, why do you think he chose the form of the play he did, rather than the realistic version?

4. How difficult do you find this play to be? Do you think an audience would have difficulty appreciating it? What are the advantages and disadvantages of reading this play rather than seeing it?

5. Would you like to see other even more difficult examples of plays from the "theatre of the absurd"? Explain.

VIII. Suggested Projects and Composition Topics

1. Analyze and justify (as far as possible) the difficulties in one of the poems not assigned in *Immortal Poems*. The following are only a few of the many possible poems you might choose:

   a. "Imagination" -- William Shakespeare (p. 68)

   b. "Better My Heart" or "Death Be Not Proud" -- John Donne (p. 89)

   c. "La Belle Dame sans Merci" -- John Keats (pp. 327-328)

   d. "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" -- Robert Browning (pp. 400-402)

   e. "Poetry" -- Marianne Moore (pp. 533-534)

   f. "Ultima Ratio Regum" -- Stephen Spender (pp. 588-589)

   g. "The Heavy Bear" -- Delmore Schwartz (pp. 598-599)

2. Analyze and justify (as far as possible) the difficulties in one of the short stories not assigned in *Short Story Masterpieces*. The following are merely suggested possibilities:

   a. "The Tree of Knowledge" -- Henry James (pp. 215-231)

b. "Marriage à la Mode" -- Katherine Mansfield (pp. 277-288)

c. "The Sojourner" -- Carson McCullers (pp. 336-346)

d. "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" -- J.D. Salinger (pp. 408-24)

3. Few of us stop to realize that all books published nowadays are edited so that they will have standard spelling, regardless of the historical or personal spelling patterns of the authors. What does uniform spelling allow us to forget about words? Write a short composition answering this question or exploring some other effect of uniform spelling.

4. How do typographical conventions--punctuation, type design, and arrangement on the page--influence readers? Answer this question in a composition of several paragraphs. For good examples of unusual typographical practices, examine a collected edition of poems by E.E. Cummings; in order to focus your discussion you might choose to consider a single Cummings poem (for example, one of the series entitled "Chansons Innocentes").

5. Several modern writers of fiction write works which could be called difficult. Pick one of the following suggested titles and use it as the basis for a composition explaining why the work is difficult and whether or not you feel the difficulty was necessary or unnecessary.

a. The Bear -- William Faulkner (In the paperback Six Great Modern Short Novels, Dell 7996)

b. Lord of the Flies or The Spire -- William Golding

c. The Stranger -- Albert Camus

d. The Castle or The Trial -- Franz Kafka

e. "The Metamorphosis," "A Hunger Artist," "In the Penal Colony," or "The Great Wall of China" -- Franz Kafka

6. Writers have often used the Bible as the basis for literature. Pick one of the following suggested works, and in a composition explain whether or not a person unfamiliar with the Bible would find it difficult.

a. William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!

b. Archibald MacLeish, J.B.

c. Thornton Wilder, The Skin of Our Teeth

d. Pär Lagerkvist, Barabbas

e. Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen), "The Wine of the Tetrarch," Atlantic Monthly CCIV, December, 1959, 125-135.

7. One source of difficulty is an author's attempt to be original. This was illustrated in this unit by modern poetry, but modern plays also may be difficult because of originality, as well as because of a complex world view. Pick one of the following plays, and in a composition explain how difficult you think it would be for an average American audience. How would you justify the difficulty you discover?

a. *The Skin of Our Teeth* -- Thornton Wilder

b. *Rhinoceros* -- Eugène Ionesco

c. *The Lesson* -- Eugène Ionesco

d. *The Chairs* -- Eugène Ionesco

e. *It Is So!* (*If You Think So*) -- Luigi Pirandello

f. *Six Characters in Search of an Author* -- Luigi Pirandello

g. *The American Dream* -- Edward Albee

8. Most common American movies are realistic enough that most people don't think of them as difficult. Can you show that this confident feeling may not be completely justified? After all, do any of us realize all of the implications of a single action on the screen? Write a short composition considering these questions. Be sure to limit yourself to one or two specific movies which you have seen and to explain the background (age, maturity, etc.) of the person or persons you are using as the typical audience.

9. Can you recall any television shows which were difficult? What happens to a difficult or challenging show? Can you see any parallel situation in the world of reading? Once you have formulated your ideas and have specific examples in mind, include them in a short composition.

10. Try writing a short story which could be called a "slice of life." Remember that though you choose the incident and organize the material, the resulting story should appear to be an almost random slice of real life. As you write, be alert to the demands you are making on your reader and the difficulties you are creating for him.

11. Try writing a poem of some sort. If you wish, you might try imitating the technique or approach of a poem you have studied in this unit or in previous units. Before writing, decide what sort of demands you wish to make on your reader. Can you justify these demands?

12. Specialists have devised all sorts of tests which can measure the difficulty of a piece of prose. One of the simpler tests, one which you might want to experiment with, depends upon the relative ease with which a person may predict omitted words from a passage. For instance, choose a 300-word sample and delete every tenth word. The easier the sample, the higher will be the score of someone who attempts to guess the deleted words. Use this test to check the readability of several magazines or of several of your textbooks. What factors are you measuring with this test? What sort of difficulty is being measured?

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OREGON CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER

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SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW
YOUTH AND AGE
TEST

Literature Curriculum VI

Instructions to students:

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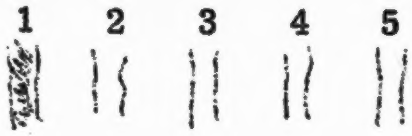

The project reported herein was supported through the Cooperative Research Program of the Office of Education, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

TE 000 216

1. Aside from the manner in which they were written, why have some literary works survived through the years?
  1) The author's name itself caused his works to be preserved.
  2) The work was ethically and morally acceptable to the masses.
  3) The form of the work maintained its popularity.
  4) They deal with experiences that are common to all generations of time.

2. What effect does the aging process have on the eagerness and impetuosity of youth that recurs most often throughout the collection of readings in this unit?
  1) the loss of curiosity
  2) a benevolent attitude toward youth
  3) a simplification of the needs of men
  4) a feeling of despair

"The Seafarer"

3. What does the old sailor emphasize most in his speech to the boy?
  1) the seaman's freedom from responsibility
  2) the hardships a sailor must endure
  3) the adventure the sea provides
  4) opportunities available to a seaman

4. Suppose the old sailor knows his words will not change the youth's desire to go to sea. Why would the old sailor most likely have reached this conclusion?
  1) He knows youth does not respect age.
  2) He knows how he felt as a youth.
  3) He knows he cannot make the sea sound distasteful because he still loves it.
  4) He really doesn't believe what he tells the youth.

5. "True is the tale that I tell of my travels,
Sing of my sea-faring sorrows and woes"
What literary technique appears in the above lines?
  1) incremental repetition
  2) alliteration
  3) imagery
  4) third person narrative

6. The young man can be best described as a man
  1) yearning for adventure
  2) fearful of hardships
  3) cautious when approaching new experiences
  4) experienced for his age

7. The universality of this poem lies in the youth's reasons for yearning to go to sea. The poet symbolizes all youth eager to
  1) travel
  2) prove themselves
  3) be seafarers
  4) challenge men older than they

8. The old sailor has a realistic acceptance of the sea while the youth's attitude is
    1) pessimistic
    2) realistic yet optimistic
    3) confused
    4) romantic

9.
Dost mind the cuckoo mournfully calling?
The summer's watchman sorrow forbodes.
What does the landsmen that wantons in luxury,
What does he reck of the rough sea's woe,
The cares of the exile, whose keel has explored
The uttermost ports of the ocean-ways!

In this speech one can see that the old sailor concludes:
    1) the landsmen have a better life
    2) had many joyous adventures
    3) it was a wasted life
    4) he learned the meaning of life

10. What thing separates the old sailor and the youth?
    1) complacency of the old sailor
    2) love of the seafaring life
    3) experience
    4) ambition

11. This poem best serves as a contrast between the values of
    1) the landsman and the sailor
    2) youth and age
    3) a wise man and an ignorant youth
    4) nature and man

Youth -- Joseph Conrad

12. "You fellows know there are those voyages that seem ordered for the illustration of life that stand for a symbol of existence. You fight, work, sweat, nearly kill yourself, sometimes do kill yourself, trying to accomplish something--and you can't. Not from any fault of yours." What is the point of view of the narrator in this passage?
    1) He is bitter toward life's experience.
    2) He is trying to interpret the meaning of life's experiences.
    3) He is seeking an answer to why things happen to industrious people.
    4) He is saying man controls his own destiny.

13. Why does the author periodically insert the phrase--"Pass the bottle"?
    1) to illustrate the drinking tradition of seamen
    2) to interrupt the narrative
    3) to point out that it is a narrative
    4) to permit the listener to reflect on what has been said

14. The form in which the story is told is a
    1) satire
    2) legend
    3) yarn
    4) fable

15. The narrator in "The Seafarer" laments the hardships of the sea while the narrator in Youth laments
    1) being poor
    2) leaving the sea
    3) growing old
    4) rising only to second mate

16. Both the old sailor in the "Seafarer" and Marlow in Conrad's Youth describe life at sea realistically. In addition, Marlow makes his account
    1) satirical
    2) sentimental
    3) romantic
    4) unbelievable

17. Why didn't the narrator ever complain about the slowness of the ship?
    1) It was an undeniable fact.
    2) It was a minor point of the story.
    3) He respected the ship for its age and length of service.
    4) Its slowness aided their fight for survival.

18. The narrator's role in Youth is of a dual nature because it requires reflections of the mature man looking back as well as
    1) judgments of his past actions by his listeners
    2) interruptions by the captain of the Judea
    3) the thoughts of a young sailor
    4) the recall of the detailed events.

19. "The world was nothing but an immensity of great foaming waves rushing at us, under a sky low enough to touch with the hand and dirty like a smoked ceiling."
Which pair of literary devices is present in the passage?
    1) understatement and exaggeration
    2) alliteration and metaphor
    3) metaphor and simile
    4) understatement and simile

20. Why was Marlow's story appropriate for his listeners?
    1) They were all Englishmen.
    2) They had been drinking.
    3) They belonged to the same club.
    4) They had been to sea.

"Fern Hill"

21. "Time held me green and dying. . ."
In this phrase the author uses the word "green" to mean

1) envious
2) young
3) sickly
4) demon-like

22. "Time held me green and dying. . ."
"Time" is a
1) simile
2) symbol
3) metaphor
4) personification

23. "Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea."
One of the things this means is
1) A child is unaware that each day brings death closer.
2) A child can be imprisoned yet happy.
3) As life came from the sea I shall imitate the sea.
4) Man is conscious of mortality yet does not always fear it.

24. One of the things Thomas used most to reflect mood and meanings, as well as provide visual image was
1) flowers
2) colors
3) rhyme
4) folk lore references

25. The phrase "once below a time. . ." is probably used by the poet
1) to be different
2) to sound poetic
3) to mean that as a child he was not conscious of time
4) for a light mood

26. "Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me." Certain phrases like this one in the poem indicate that the poet equates youth with
1) adventure
2) carelessness
3) limitless joy
4) innocence

27. "Golden in the heydays of his eyes,"
"Golden in the mercy of his means,"
Golden is a color that connotes both warmth and
1) materialism
2) preciousness
3) happiness
4) innocence

28. "The sun that is young once only" means that to a child
1) The sun is young.
2) He himself is young only once.
3) The sun is young once only during the day; old at night.
4) The sun has a different quality in his youth than in later life.

29. Why does the poet use long lines?
    1) to make the poem artistically complex
    2) to indicate the youth's mature speech
    3) to provide the correct rhyme
    4) to portray the excitement of youth

30. Before the last 2 stanzas the word that might best describe the tone of the poem is
    1) joy
    2) carefree attitude
    3) regret
    4) expectancy

31. How do the last two stanzas of the poem compare to Marlow's summary of his voyage?
    1) Marlow contends the experiences of youth are good to look back upon but really were not very pleasant whereas the poet says they were pleasant.
    2) Marlow says that the sea is youthful always and the poet says sunlight is always youthful.
    3) Marlow and the poet both say that youth is the only time in life that really counts.
    4) Both Marlow and the poet agree that life is too brief.

32. What do all three authors in this unit regret?
    1) that experiences cause man to lose the lustre and idealism of youth
    2) that they **had not** done more with their youth
    3) that they should try to be young again
    4) that man should not let travails of the world affect his life.

33. Which of the three pieces of literature is least hopeful for the future?
    1) "The Seafarer"
    2) Youth
    3) "Fern Hill"

34. Why was a natural setting such as the sea used so often in literature for dealing with the problem of aging?
    1) Everyone likes the sea.
    2) Everyone knows a lot about the sea.
    3) The sea is considered to be ageless and impartial.
    4) The sea is symbolic of man's destiny.

35. Which of the following principles of rhetoric is exemplified by each of the three authors in dealing with a common theme?
    1) The method of saying something is as important as what is said.
    2) The theme is of universal interest to people of all ages and everywhere.
    3) The literary work must teach a lesson of life.
    4) The words must all be in the vocabulary of the reader.

OREGON CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER

TEST

LITERATURE VI

Something Old, Something New Part II

Christian Tradition

Instructions to students:

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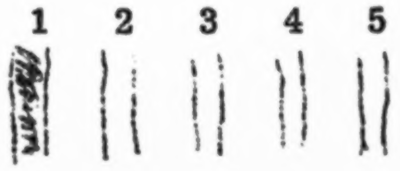

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TE 000 216

The Second Shepherd's Play

1. When did the plays like The Second Shepherd's Play originate?
   (1) during the early Christian era
   (2) the medieval period
   (3) the Renaissance
   (4) 18th century
   (5) 20th century

2. What was the purpose of these "mystery plays"?
   (1) to spread Christianity
   (2) to entertain the people
   (3) to be morally instructive
   (4) both (1) and (2)
   (5) both (2) and (3)

3. What is the subject matter of the play?
   (1) morality and immorality
   (2) comedy and tragedy
   (3) romance and realism
   (4) the secular and the religious

4. For what reason above all others has this play survived as literature throughout the years?
   (1) It is about poor people.
   (2) It is about the common people.
   (3) It is concerned with universal problems.
   (4) It is related to Christianity.

5. What is meant by "Our fields they lie as fallow as a floor"?
   (1) The fields are smooth as the floor.
   (2) The fields are as hard as the floor.
   (3) The fields are the color of wooden floors.
   (4) The fields are as fertile as the floor.

6. What does the first shepherd mean when he says, "It does me good, when I walk round alone, about this world to grumble and to groan."?
   (1) It is good exercise for him to move about.
   (2) It makes him feel good to complain about his hardships even to himself.
   (3) It would not be good for him to complain of his dislike for the rich to anyone else.
   (4) He has no friends who can understand his hard life.

7. Why do the Second Shepherd and Mak complain so much about their wives?
   (1) They dislike them.
   (2) They dislike the children they bear.
   (3) They are unfaithful to them.
   (4) They believe they are the cause of their misery.

8. Why would the audience laugh when the Second Shepherd closes his speech with

   I'm one for a mate, if ever I read the Epistle who's rough
   as is a briar and sharp as thistle

Her looks are sour; her eyebrows, like hog's bristle
She'd sing "Our Father" if once she wet her whistle
And like a whale she's fat,
Full of gall as a vat
I don't know where I'm at.

(1) because they all have a wife who fits the description
(2) because they are humorous lines
(3) because he is so stupid that he doesn't know where he is
(4) because they hear others around them laughing

9. Which adjective best describes the male characters in the play?
(1) dirty
(2) shiftless
(3) romantic
(4) realistic

10. Why is it difficult to condemn Mak for his actions?
(1) He is poor.
(2) He has an unreasonable wife.
(3) His behavior amuses us.
(4) He is too unrealistic.

11. What is one purpose served by the first part of the play in relation to the message of the final nativity scene?
(1) Christ would reform thieves like Mak.
(2) Christ came to redeem men like these.
(3) Christ was not without a sense of humor.
(4) Christ is often referred to as the Good Shepherd.

12. What does the statement by the Third Shepherd "We'd best forget what's been" symbolize?
(1) forgiveness
(2) moral decay
(3) hopelessness of reform
(4) unselfishness

13. What do the words that Mak said after he stole the sheep imply?

"Though I pay not tomorrow
I'll in the meantime borrow."

(1) He intended to pay for the sheep.
(2) He wanted to pay for the sheep now.
(3) He felt guilty stealing the sheep.
(4) He thought his scheme was clever.

14. The comic birth scene in Mak's home is important to the unity of the play because it
(1) completes our understanding of Mak
(2) provides riotous comedy
(3) foreshadows the nativity scene
(4) enlightens us about Jill's character

15. In Scene vii the shepherds' singing out of tune, trying to imitate the angels, emphasizes the fact that man
    (1) sets his goals impossibly high
    (2) never meets God's acts with the proper solemnity
    (3) try as he may, cannot be perfect
    (4) is not amusing to God.

The Journey of the Magi

16. Who is the speaker in The Journey of the Magi?
    (1) the poet himself
    (2) King Herod
    (3) a shepherd
    (4) one of the wise men

17. "A cold coming we had of it"
    This alliteration is effective because the sounds are
    (1) guttural
    (2) sharp
    (3) symbolic
    (4) soft

18. What does the poet do to give the poem a mood of convincing realism?
    (1) describes the character of the wise man
    (2) shows how many temptations the wise man faced
    (3) uses common details known to the reader
    (4) follows the scriptural story

19. What word might best describe the magi's attitude while en route?
    (1) uncertainty
    (2) bitterness
    (3) confidence
    (4) awe

20. The line "Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver," symbolizes the poem's final message.
    (1) man worshipping silver rather than Christ
    (2) Christ's resurrection
    (3) Christ's betrayal to death
    (4) the gamble the wise men took to make the journey

21. What has bothered the wise man most even after he completed his quest and saw the newborn Christ?
    (1) death being a part of the birth
    (2) the Christ child's humble beginnings
    (3) people denying Christ
    (4) how to worship Christ once he had seen him

22. "I should be glad of another death." When the wise man speaks of death in this personal way, what does he mean?
    (1) He should be glad if Christ died for us once more the same way.
    (2) He wishes death to be something less harsh than it is.
    (3) He prefers death and rebirth to the old pagan life.
    (4) He wants to die that he might meet Christ again.

23. Who or what might the old wise man symbolize?
    (1) nobility's reaction to Christ
    (2) the few who denied Christ's being the Son of God
    (3) all mankind who may have been touched by Christ's birth
    (4) the old order struggling to survive

The Second Coming

24. William Butler Yeats sees history as
    (1) a circular, cyclic movement of events
    (2) a series of unrelated events followed by a period of order
    (3) a period of revolution followed by a period of order
    (4) constant strife

25. What does Yeats see as the state of affairs at the end of an era?
    (1) a ceremony of great dignity
    (2) a subtle overthrow of existing traditions
    (3) a complete denial of all the past
    (4) a period of complete chaos

26. In this poem what is Yeats actually talking ab out?
    (1) the death of the Christian era and the birth of a new era
    (2) political anarchy
    (3) men who fear the unknown
    (4) the second coming of Christ when he will judge the living and the dead

27. The image of the "rough beast" in the second stanza could best be described as an image to convey man's
    (1) pain in this world
    (2) horror of the future
    (3) guilt for his past behavior
    (4) denial of Christ's second coming

28. What does the falconer represent?
    (1) the falcon's nesting place
    (2) the person that is causing the turbulent times
    (3) the central control system of the universe
    (4) the centrifugal force that spins everything away from the center

29. In the last two lines Yeats says "And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, /Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?" What does he imply by these words?
    (1) He is comparing the Christ-child to a rough beast.
    (2) He is blaming Christ for the terrible state of current affairs.
    (3) He is saying that the Roman soldiers are set to crucify Christ.
    (4) He believes a change must be imminent because the world cannot go on as it is now.

30. How are Journey of the Magi and "The Second Coming" similar?
    (1) Both have tones of horror.
    (2) Both emphasize the relationship between the beginning and the end of things.
    (3) In both the theme is the sinfulness of man.
    (4) Both deal with the nativity's message of redemption.

OREGON CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER

TEST

LITERATURE VI

Something New, Something Old

Part III--Conflict of Generations

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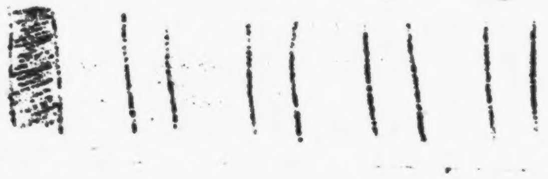

The project reported herein was supported through the Cooperative Research Program of the Office of Education, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

TE 000 216

"Soldier's Home"

1. Why is the title of this story somewhat ironic?
    1. Because his home was destroyed while he was at war destroying others' homes.
    2. Because he has no desire to be there.
    3. Because home is not like it was when he left.
    4. Because it is difficult for him to become a part of it after the intervening experiences.

2. What is the difference between 'order' as Krebs sees it and 'order' as his family views it?
    1. To attain the order of his family, it is necessary to compromise whereas order to Krebs is simplicity and directness.
    2. Order to his parents is religious whereas to Krebs it is atheism.
    3. To his parents, order is stoicism and self-deprivation whereas to Krebs order is the easy life of a career militarist.
    4. His parents believe there is order in a life with no self-restraints whereas Krebs maintains man needs military discipline to have order.

3. How did the author achieve economy with respect to length of the story in the manner in which the story was written?
    1. By omitting information about where Krebs had served in the service.
    2. By beginning the story with a concise biographical sketch of Krebs' life to the present.
    3. By not telling us Krebs' sisters' names and more about them.
    4. By not giving us insight into the reasons for Krebs' behavior.

4. An illustration of Krebs liking order is demonstrated by his appreciation of
    1. the uniform style of dress of the hometown girls
    2. his father's business
    3. his mother's devotion to religion
    4. his young sister's actions

5. What is the significance of his parents granting him permission to use the car at nights?
    1. It showed that he could act independently of family ties.
    2. It indicated that he was being bribed to enter the family business.
    3. It showed that he was always able to get his wishes satisfied by acting indifferently.
    4. It indicated that his parents were beginning to regard him as an adult.

6. What adjective might best describe Krebs?
    1. loyal
    2. immature
    3. unsympathetic to others.
    4. a reluctant rebel

7. What was it about the war that Krebs liked best?
    1. The simplicity of the war
    2. He was accepted as an individual.
    3. The publicity he received as a soldier.
    4. The traveling experiences it afforded him.

8. Why couldn't Krebs remain at home?
    1. His family deprived him of an uncomplicated, independent life.
    2. He had lied, and feared discovery.
    3. His father was a tyrant.
    4. He disliked what order he found there.

9. The war, his sister's baseball game and pool all represent to Krebs
    1. the action, precision and skill he admired.
    2. a lazy streak that kept him from real work.
    3. his heroism on the battlefield.
    4. his wish to be an athlete.

10. What is most difficult for Mrs. Krebs to understand?
    1. That he is not ungrateful to her.
    2. That he can love her and act the way he does.
    3. His relationship with his sister.
    4. That he must be himself, and not what she wants him to be.

11. This story speaks of the attainment of maturity as well as noting that
    1. youth can never be reconciled with age.
    2. mothers are universally domineering.
    3. youth become man, can't go home again.
    4. war destroys men.

12. Krebs is repulsed by his mother because she
    1. forces him against his will to be independent.
    2. misunderstands his war experiences.
    3. spoils him.
    4. wants to bind him to her and his home.

13. Krebs tells lies about his war experiences because
    1. he wants to appear a hero.
    2. people would laugh at him otherwise.
    3. he has been too shocked by war to force reality.
    4. people do not want to hear the realities of war.

14. How were Krebs' actions in the war different from his actions at home? They were
    1. complex
    2. honest
    3. motivated by hate
    4. mature

15. Hemingway seems to say that a son must become a man and find his own life. What is the tone of the author as he attempts to make this point? He
    1. sympathizes with the parents
    2. mocks Krebs
    3. pities Krebs
    4. is objective

"Putting the Blame on His Sons"

16. The main point emphasized in the poem by Ch'ien is the parental feeling that
    1. children should develop as well as other people's children.
    2. parents wish to have some claim on their children.
    3. children should be individualistic and not copies of their parents.
    4. children have the optim to do as they wish.

17. Because of the specific ages and the father's command for the cup we might feel that the father's lament is
    1. exaggerated.
    2. justified.
    3. cruel.
    4. humorous.

18. "Bring on, bring on
    The thing within the cup."
    What is the "thing within the cup"?
    1. acceptance.
    2. poison.
    3. money.
    4. tea.

19. "If such was Heaven's decree
    In spite of all that I could do, . . ." This statement indicates that the father cannot imagine that
    1. the Gods would defy him.
    2. his sons will not improve.
    3. his own influence could produce such sons.
    4. the Gods' decision is in error.

"David and Absalom"

20. Joab says that David's weeping for his son has shamed all of his subjects because it means that David
    1. appears weak and unkingly by crying.
    2. condones wrongs done by members of his family that he would not tolerate in his subjects.
    3. Regards a renegade son more highly than faithful followers.
    4. has not enough faith in God.

21. David's relationship to his people can best be described as
    1. King and father.
    2. Priest and king.
    3. King and merchant.
    4. Lord and master.

22. Why did Absalom fail, according to the story?
    1. He opposed his own father.
    2. He let passion overrule reason.
    3. He confided in too many persons.
    4. He defied the will of God.

"All My Sons"

23. Drama differs from short stories and poems in that the most essential things are revealed through
    1. dialogue.
    2. characterization.
    3. a narrator.
    4. stage directions.

24. What is the central problem in this play?
    1. Kate's resentment of Ann
    2. Chris' love for Ann
    3. Joe's guilt
    4. Larry's death

25. The author first presents the character of Joe to the audience as a
    1. man fond of children, easy going and pleasant.
    2. intelligent professional man.
    3. sly businessman who has a great love for his family and friends.
    4. stern father-loving husband.

26. Keller turns his having been in jail into a joke because he
    1. wants people to believe he can laugh at a mistake.
    2. likes to entertain the children.
    3. wants to feel his crime is only make-believe.
    4. has a cynical sense of humor.

27. The fallen tree has symbolic meaning. It represents
    1. man's fickle memory of so-called cherished family and friends.
    2. the barren relationship between Joe and his lost son, Larry.
    3. nature's indifference to man's deeper concerns.
    4. the future eruption of Joe's guilt.

28. The families' reaction to the possibility of Larry returning tells us something about their attitudes and beliefs about
    1. Ann's arrival
    2. Joe's death
    3. Joe's guilt
    4. Chris' suffering

29. Of all the central characters in the play who is most oblivious to the true state of Joe's guilt?
    1. Chris
    2. Kate
    3. George
    4. Ann

30. One of the main reasons Kate refuses to believe that Larry is dead is because
    1. she must believe Joe is innocent.
    2. she doesn't want Ann to marry Chris.
    3. she is a weak person, unable to face death in her family.
    4. Larry was her favorite son.

31. The reader's or viewer's point of view of the circumstances is similar to that of
    1. Ann.
    2. Chris.
    3. Joe.
    4. Jim Bayliss.

32. The word that would best describe the tone of the scenes preceding Ann's arrival would be
    1. sympathy.
    2. foreboding.
    3. fear.
    4. pity.

33. What might be taken as a clue that Chris is not altogether devoid of suspecting his father?
    1. His belief that Larry is dead which opposes the belief of his mother.
    2. His decision to invite Ann to their home against his parents' wishes.
    3. His visit to Ann's father in prison.
    4. His reluctance to have his name attached to the family business.

34. "You notice there's more light with that thing (tree sic) gone?" says Kate. This line indicates that Kate momentarily acknowledges
    1. that faith will bring Larry back.
    2. her failure as a wife driving her husband for the sake of money.
    3. the enmity of their neighbors.
    4. that the truth will be revealed.

35. One of the first hints that Joe was guilty was Kate's comment that her husband
    1. worshipped the almighty dollar.
    2. disliked Ann's father.
    3. was never sick.
    4. had nightmares months after being released from prison.

36. Keller is able to maintain a deceptive front until what person becomes his accuser?
    1. Kate
    2. Frank
    3. Ann
    4. Chris

37. Joe rationalizes his actions by trying to place the blame on his family. He said he wanted to
    1. protect them.
    2. make them proud of him.
    3. make money for them.
    4. raise their social status.

38. What finally drives Joe to face his guilt?
    1. George's visit
    2. Larry's letter
    3. Kate's anger
    4. Larry's astrology report

39. Joe is destroyed when he feels
    1. deserted by Kate
    2. hated by his neighbors
    3. his relationship with his son, Chris, is destroyed
    4. he has destroyed 22 men

40. Before the revelation of Joe's guilt the word that might best describe Chris is
    1. idealistic.
    2. naive.
    3. dishonest.
    4. mature.

41. What plays a key part in the elevation of the material from merely unfortunate to tragic?
    1. Youth loses Innocence.
    2. Kate's refusal to face reality.
    3. The father-son relationship.
    4. Larry and Joe's deaths.

OREGON CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER

SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING OLD
Part IV

Literature Curriculum VI

Instructions to students:

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TE 000 216

1. What is the central theme of the play Antigone?
   1) the conflict between a king and his daughter.
   2) the vengeance of the gods for sins against them
   3) the conflict between an individual conscience and the interests of the state
   4) the struggle between the citizens of a state and their leader

2. Why does Ismene not wish to help Antigone bury their brother?
   1) She did not love him.
   2) He died dishonorably.
   3) She does not feel bound by the gods to do so.
   4) She is unable to defy the state.

3. What is the significance of Teiresias speech to Creon in which he says:
   "And so the Avengers, Furies sent by Death,
   And by the Gods, lie in waiting to destroy you
   And snare you in the evils you have worked."?
   1) It tells us that Creon will be killed.
   2) It indicates that Creon will not release Antigone.
   3) It predicts the death of his son Haeman.
   4) It predicts an overthrow of the government under Creon.

4. Antigone's actions are best explained as a result of her
   1) association with Teiresias.
   2) conscience and duty to sacred law.
   3) lack of conscience hence disloyalty to Creon.
   4) sister's complacency.

5. Creon acts on the premise that to preserve the state and its unity the ruler must be
   1) admired.
   2) obeyed.
   3) a father image.
   4) flexible.

6. What does Antigone fear most?
   1) losing Haemon
   2) physical harm
   3) betraying her own conscience
   4) Creon's anger

7. Creon believes that the only reason someone would disobey him would be for
   1) ambition
   2) money
   3) revenge
   4) excitement

8. Creon does not suspect Antigone because he can't conceive of
   1) the betrayer being a relative.
   2) a person courageous enough to disobey him.
   3) disobedience to the state because of private beliefs.
   4) anyone disagreeing with a state order.

9. "Hated, despised, and driven by the sins
He had himself laid bare, to turn his hand
Against himself, And strike out both his eyes"
Who does this quotation describe?
   1) Polyneices
   2) Oedipus
   3) Creon
   4) an old man of the chorus

10. The Chorus in this Greek play is composed of
   1) old men.
   2) Antigone's peers.
   3) town gossips.
   4) the Furies.

11. Why do you know the outcome of the play from the beginning?
   1) The state leaders in Greece were all powerful.
   2) The gods ordained Antigone's death.
   3) You knew Ismene will betray Antigone.
   4) You knew Haemon will not intercede between Antigone and his father.

12. In the face of resistance Creon becomes
   1) conscience stricken.
   2) more determined.
   3) intellectually dishonest.
   4) compassionate.

13. At what point in the story does the reader lose all sympathy for Creon's position? When he
   1) calls for Ismene to be punished too.
   2) refuses to bury both of Antigone's brothers.
   3) defies the State himself.
   4) takes Teirisias' advice.

14. One of the things Creon's pride will not allow is to
   1) take back Antigone's death sentence.
   2) forgive Ismene.
   3) give in to a woman.
   4) argue with Haemon.

15. In tragedies the characters meet disaster because of
   1) fate which they can't control.
   2) a flaw in their character.
   3) the gods' will.
   4) nature overpowering them.

16. What motivates Creon to act as he does?
   1) anger
   2) pride
   3) the good of the state alone
   4) all of these

17. "This is her father's willful spirit in her/
Not knowing how to bend before the storm."
These words are used by the chorus to describe
1) Antigone
2) Ismene
3) Creon's wife
4) the messenger

18. One of the functions of the chorus is to
1) provide humor or unity to a grave situation.
2) serve as the judge of the characters' actions.
3) enable the reader to take sides.
4) assist in the movement of the play.

19. Antigone's death lament is made all the more pathetic because she
1) regrets involving Ismene.
2) laments sacrificing ever being a bride or mother.
3) fears death.
4) regrets her actions.

20. What happens eventually to Polyneice's body?
1) It receives its proper burial.
2) It is hidden by carrion.
3) It is enshrined as a heroe's body.
4) It disappears.

21. "My hands can do nothing right;
I am crushed beneath my fate."
These words are spoken by
1) Creon
2) the messenger
3) Haemon
4) Antigone

22. Violent actions such as murders and suicide are not presented on stage because visual violence
1) was ruled against by the Grecian state.
2) would have been sacrilege to the Grecian people.
3) led to revolt by the people.
4) was offensive rather then exciting.

23. "I shall go and see in case
She is keeping some dark purpose hidden from us
In her grief torn head."
Who is the messenger referring to?
1) Creon's wife
2) Ismene
3) Antigone's maid
4) Antigone

24. If you had to rank order the followings sources of motivation for Creon's actions, which would you give the position of most importance?
1) conscience
2) public interest
3) personal pride
4) belief in the gods

3

Koestler -- Darkness at Noon

25. Rubashov, shortly after he arrived in prison, is described as follows:

> ". . .He was warmly wrapped up in the blanket, and felt protected; for the first time in months he was not afraid of his dreams."

This is an example of
   1) exaggeration.
   2) irony.
   3) paradox.
   4) metaphor.

26. Why can it be said that Rubashov is on trial to himself as much as to the state?
   1) He had never been true to any principle.
   2) He had justified the means by the ends.
   3) He had mistreated those who had him on trial.
   4) He had held the individual above the state.

27. What is the most important question, the reader must answer while reading the story?
   1) Is communism evil?
   2) What does the author favor--the party or Rubashov?
   3) What is the plot of the story?
   4) Of what crime is Rubashov guilty?

28. What literary purpose is served by the inter-cell tapping between Rubashov and #402?
   1) It aids in completing the readers picture of Rubashov.
   2) It allows the plot to be unfolded more systematically.
   3) It heightens the suspense because the prisoners wait for communications.
   4) It gives the reader insight into the psychology of a prison.

29. The trial of Rubashov is intended to correspond to which of the following time in Russian history?
   1) the revolutionary period of 1917-19
   2) the late 1920's
   3) the purge of the mid-thirties under Stalin
   4) the removal of the image of Stalin in the 50's

Questions 30-32 are based on the following passage,

Early in the story, you read:

> "The old disease, thought Rubashov. Revolutionaries should not think through other's minds. Or perhaps they should? Or even ought to? How can one change the world if one identifies oneself with everybody? How else can one change it? He who understands and forgives--where would he find a motive to act? Where would he not?

30. Why shouldn't revolutionaries think through other's minds?
    1) They must have creative thoughts of their own and consider them to be the only ones worthwhile.
    2) They must not identify with any of the past.
    3) They could not act because they would realize it is not democratic to do so.
    4) They would be placing the individual ahead of the movement.

31. To what question is Rubashov trying to find an answer?
    1) Did I attempt to bring about change in the wrong way?
    2) Am I personally guilty of injustices to the state?
    3) Did I think of others too often?
    4) Will my motives be of interest to my opponents?

32. The philosophy depicted in this passage reveals the paradox in which he is caught. What is it?
    1) He has been too considerate of others and therein lies his guilt.
    2) He is the victim of the philosophy that he had previously taught others was wrong.
    3) He has not been true to himself.
    4) He succeeded in changing everyone but himself.

33. What is significant about the fact that Rubashov recalled the incident with the person called Richard who he met in the museum?
    1) It provided him with answers to 402.
    2) It permitted him to see that Richard had really committed no unforgivable crime.
    3) It gave the author an opportunity to reveal Rubashov's past.
    4) It showed Rubashov was still honored by many people such as the taxi driver who drove him to the station after the meeting.

34. Why did Rubashov extinguish the cigarette butt on the back of his hand?
    1) as an act of rebellion against his captors
    2) to secure entrance to the infirmary from which escape would be simpler
    3) as preparations for expected torture and beating
    4) because he knew someone was watching his behavior through the spy hall

35. From the standpoint of logical reasoning processes, at what point did Rubashov oppose the party?
    1) when he no longer believed in his own infallibility
    2) when he realized his friends of long standing were dead
    3) when he could not accept Ivanov's offer of assistance
    4) when he first developed or recognized his personal feelings

36. What is the 'grammatical fiction', Rubashov refers to?
    1) the development of his personal feelings
    2) the memories of the past
    3) the errors of the state
    4). all the errors he and his friends had made unconsciously

37. How did Gletkin justify the use of brutality in order to implement the changes in the life of the peasantry so abruptly?
    1) It was not brutal or cruel in the eyes of the peasants who were used to a hard life.
    2) It was no more brutal than the tactics used by older civilizations in their early stages.
    3) The people were too stupid to object.
    4) It was most expeditious.

38. What major purpose did the trial and period of imprisonment serve for Rubashov's own sake?
    1) It gave him an opportunity to condemn the party.
    2) It permitted him to study the make-up of a 'neanderthaler'.
    3) It gave him the opportunity to study various types of political prisoners.
    4) It was a time during which he was able to complete a personal philosophy.

39. Why was the 'harelip' such a pathetic figure?
    1) because of his physical affliction
    2) because he was a traitor to Rubeshov
    3) because he was encapable of carrying on in the tradition of his father
    4) because he was afraid of Gletkin

40. What was the greatest accompolishment of the author with respect to point of view?
    1) He very ably pointed out the way a communist views the outer world and communists view as to how it will be conquered.
    2) He succeeded in showing the point of view of death by the convicted, who feels he is innocent of any crime.
    3) The view that communists have no personal feelings for themselves or others especially Americans.
    4) He portrayed very ably the comflict between the individual and the state within an avowed Communist.

OREGON CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER

DIFFICULT LITERATURE TEST

Literature Curriculum VI

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	▮	‖	‖	‖	‖

TE 000 216

The Project reported herein was supported through the Cooperative Research Program of the Office of Education, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

1. According to the definition of "difficult literature" given in this unit, what is the one main reason a reader finds a piece of literature difficult?
   1) The reader is illiterate.
   2) The reader is unintelligent.
   3) The reader has had poor reading instruction in previous years.
   4) The reader lacks background necessary for understanding the piece of literature.

2. Why does humor become outdated more rapidly than other types of writing?
   1) Because humor requires knowledge of a particular frame of reference with respect to time.
   2) Because humor is based upon the complex issues of everyday life which are changing from day to day.
   3) Because humor does not rely upon the themes used most often in literature.
   4) Humor depends upon the writer's ability to obscure an idea which is only effective temporarily before everyone finds out about it.

3. Why is the King James version of the New Testament of the Bible more difficult for you to understand than the Phillips translation of it?
   1) the complexity of the problems
   2) changes in word meanings
   3) the obscure writing in the King James version
   4) the difference in the intent of the writer

4. Why do poets often use obscure language in their poetry?
   1) They have to follow certain guidelines required for writing poetry.
   2) Their ideas or themes are not new but they seek a new way to express them.
   3) The ideas themselves are complex because of the complexity of life.
   4) They use it for emphasis and effectiveness.

5. Why is what "literary experts" call "good literature" often disliked by readers?
   1) It is about things that occurred too long ago.
   2) It is difficult.
   3) It is prescribed by teachers and students don't like to be told to do things.
   4) The print is usually too small for easy reading.

6. For which one of the following types of readers would Thurber's "You Could Look It Up" be most difficult?
   1) a college graduate
   2) a high school student
   3) an Englishman
   4) a college professor in America

7. In "You Could Look It Up," the language of the narrator is most like
   1) written English.
   2) spoken English.
   3) "pidgin" English.
   4) dialectic English.

8. From the language used by Thurber in the story, which are you expected to infer about the narrator?
   1) He is stupid.
   2) He is probably uneducated.
   3) He imitates the reader.
   4) He learned English as an adult.

9. The baseball players mentioned were real except for those on Squawk's team. Why did Thurber bother to include real details?
   1) to date his story
   2) to honor baseball heroes
   3) to appeal to baseball fans
   4) to lend credibility to the story

10. What effect does the language irregularity produce?
    1) humor
    2) sympathy
    3) tragedy
    4) innocence

11. What reason probably accounts for the fact that many Christians prefer the King James version of the Bible to more recent translations even though they have difficulty interpreting it?
    1) They believe it is the most valid translation.
    2) They don't know it is also a translation.
    3) They "grew up" with the King James version.
    4) They believe it is more sacred.

12. What type of historical change has taken place in the underlined words in the following lines from "Sumer Is Icumen In"?

    > "Sumer is icumen in,
    > Lhude sing cuccu;
    > Groweth sed and bloweth med
    > And springeth the wude nu.

    1) pronunciation
    2) spelling
    3) usage
    4) obsolescense

13. What was meant by the word "Lhude" in the lines quoted in the previous item?
    1) lewd
    2) lowed
    3) lull
    4) loud

14. What is the difference between the kind of change which has taken place in the Middle English word murie now pronounced and spelled merry as compared with the change in the word charity?

1) Charity has undergone a more severe spelling change than murie, that is from charity to love.
2) The word murie changed in spelling whereas charity has changed in meaning.
3) The word murie and charity both have undergone change in meaning, but the latter has more than one meaning now.
4) Murie changed in spelling as well as meaning whereas charity only changed in meaning.

15. In the following lines from Shakespeare's, As You Like It, what is the meaning of saws?

> "______________. And then the justice,
> In fair round belly with good capon lin'd,
> With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut,
> Full of wise saws and modern instances;

1) saws
2) cutting tools
3) rich foods
4) sayings

16. Why is Shakespeare often difficult for the average modern reader?
1) Poetry of any age is difficult.
2) Shakespearean English was more difficult than modern English.
3) Shakespearean English was intended to be read by only the "ideal" reader which in his time meant all of those who could read.
4) The English language has changed in many ways since Shakespeare's time.

17. In his description of the third age of man in "The Seven Ages of Man" Shakespeare wrote:

> "________________. And then the lover
> Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
> Made to his mistress' eyebrow. __________"

What is the intended mood of this sentence?
1) irony
2) hyperbole
3) humor
4) pathos

18. What is meant by "made to his mistress' eyebrow."?
1) the direction of his speech
2) the subject of his ballad
3) the gaze of the lover
4) the lover's emotion figuratively scratches his mistress' eyebrow

19. How would you classify the theme of this speech --"The Seven Ages of Man."--as a theme for literature?
1) novel
2) archaic
3) periodic
4) common

20. In the description of the sixth age of man, Shakespeare says:

"His youthful hose well sav'd a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; ______________________"

What does this mean?

1) The man's stockings (hose) have shrunk.
2) The man's stockings have been given much wear throughout the years.
3) The youthful hose are not a becoming style to the older man.
4) The hose do not fit the man at this age because his legs have shriveled.

21. What is meant by "cultural distance" in talking about the difficulty of literature?

1) It is the time that has passed between cultures of civilization.
2) the distance between the nations, states, or continents in which the different cultures are found.
3) the lack of knowledge of the culture on the part of the reader.
4) lack of ability to understand thoroughly the culture about which an author is writing

22. The first stanza of "I Sing of A Maiden" is given below:'

" I sing of a maiden
That is makeles;
King of all kings
To her son she ches."

What lines are examples of "historical distance"?

1) 1 and 2
2) 1 and 3
3) 1 and 4
4) 2 and 4

23. Which line may for some readers be an example of "cultural distance"?

1) 1
2) 2
3) 3
4) 4

24. Why is the "Ballad of the Goodly Fere" likely to be difficult for the modern reader even though Ezra Pound the author is a recent author?

1) Because it involves a lot of abbreviated spellings of words, such as ha' for have, wi' for with, etc.
2) Because it involves many references to the sea and many readers have no acquaintance with the sea.
3) Because it requires a knowledge of the story of Christ.
4) Because it was written for agnostics.

25. What is the author referring to in the following stanza from "Ballad of the Goodly Fere":

"I ha' seen him drive a hundred men
Wi' a bundle o' cords swung free,
That they took the high and holy house
For their pawn and treasury."

1) the hanging of a hundred men who robbed the treasury
2) the "chasing out" of money changers from the temple
3) the stealing of a bundle of money from the hands of the treasurer
4) the destruction of a pawn shop

26. The factor of "personal connotations" as a source of difficulty in reading literature is illustrated by Barker's, "Sonnet to My Mother." Why is this such a good example?
   1) Because he describes his mother in a manner that reminds the reader of his own mother.
   2) Because he describes his mother in a manner quite different from the usual concept of a mother.
   3) Because he obviously did love his mother.
   4) Because mother to him means mother earth with all its disappointments.

27. What is the author describing in the line: "Sitting as huge as Asia, seismic with laughter, "?
   1) His mother was a leader in Asia.
   2) His mother sat cross-legged like a Buddha.
   3) His mother was large and laughter caused her to shake things around her.
   4) Her laughter was heard in Asia it was so loud.

Shakespeare's sonnet, "My Mistress' Eyes" is given below. Item 28-31 are based upon it.

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red then her lips red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.

I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

28. What source of difficulty given below is most likely to be encountered by the reader of this sonnet?
   1) historical distance
   2) cultural distance
   3) author originality
   4) personal connotation

29. What selection which you have read in this unit is most comparable in difficulty to this sonnet?

1) "Pied Beauty"
2) "Sonnet to My Mother"
3) "Ballad of the Goodly Fere"
4) "Seven Ages of Man"

30. What feature of poetry is present in the 6th line of the first stanza of the sonnet?
1) the use of a simile
2) the use of archaic words
3) an abrupt change in metrical pattern
4) unusual sentence structure

31. Until the last two lines of the sonnet, what image has Shakespeare given us of the woman he loves?
1) She is more beautiful to him than anything he has seen.
2) He thinks of her as a poor substitute for the beauty of nature.
3) In comparison to nature she would come in a poor second.
4) She looks like a very intelligent, highly perfumed, rosy-cheeked girl with roses in her hair.

32. Why do poets use a lot of metaphorical language?
1) to maintain meter and rhyme
2) to help the reader to see something as the poet imagines it to be
3) to make poetry intriguing
4) to make poetry different than prose

33. In the poem "Pied Beauty," the poet's use of words that can be considered in more than one way contributes to the difficulty a reader may have with the poem. Which word in the line given below has more than one meaning?

"For skies of couple-colour as a brinded-cow"

1) couple
2) color
3) cow
4) brinded

34. In the lines:

"Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;"

what literary device does the poet use?
1) alliteration
2) metaphor
3) simile
4) contrast

35. The first stanza of William Carlos Williams' "The Yachts" is given below:

"The Yachts"
contend in a sea which the land partly encloses
shielding them from the too heavy blows
of an ungoverned ocean which when it chooses.

What is the most striking feature of this poetry outside the lack of capitals?

1) It has no metrical pattern.
2) It is written much like prose.
3) It is lacking in poetic description.
4) It has stanzas of only 3 lines each.

36. Why is the yacht race an appropriate metaphor for the struggle of man toward a goal?
1) The race continues even if some yachts experience disaster.
2) The struggle for life of one person is insignificant in the total picture.
3) The life of today is a race often termed ratrace instead of yacht race.
4) The yachts correspond to the persons who have little regard for the rest of humanity.

37. What is the function of author originality that makes one poem more difficult to understand than another if both deal with the same general theme, for example, the shortness of life?
1) an unusual meter
2) the degree of abstractness
3) the use of archaic language
4) the length of the poem

38. "There are no homecomings, of course, no good-byes
In that land, neither yearning nor scorning,"
These lines from Rodger's, "Neither Here nor There" are analogous to which of the following:
1) Mankind lives in a world of contradictions.
2) Perfection is unattainable by man.
3) Passiveness brings happiness.
4) Without unhappiness, there is no happiness.

39. In the first of the two lines quoted above, Rodgers uses the phrase "of course". Why is this more effective then merely saying:
"There are no homecomings and no good-byes"?
1) It points out the logic involved.
2) It sounds better.
3) It lends to the continuity of the meter.
4) It is more of an abstraction and hence more poetic.

40. In "The Use of Force" as in other modern stories who does the author intend to interpret the story?
1) the author himself
2) the reviewers
3) the English teachers
4) the reader.

41. Upon what basis does the doctor justify his use of fence?
1) for the sake of the $3 fee
2) for the sake of his profession.
3) for the sake of the girl
4) for the sake of his reputation

42. What is the most likely reason the young girl did not want the doctor to look at her throat?
    1) Her parents had never made her do anything she didn't want to do.
    2) She was afraid to know the truth.
    3) She was afraid of the consequences of the truth.
    4) She was afraid of the new doctor.

43. The chief conflict the boy experiences in the story "Barn Burning" is between
    1) love for his father and desire for truth and justice.
    2) love of his family and religion.
    3) desire for a stable life and desire to travel throughout the South.
    4) love for his sisters and mother as opposed to hate for his father.

44. Why did the father burn barns?
    1) Because he was a pyro-maniac (firebug).
    2) Because he had fought against the south during the civil war and what it represents.
    3) Because he resents his position in life.
    4) Because he could steal the livestock while the owners were fighting the fire.

45. What is symbolized by the fact that the boy sees his father as a silhouette or only as a two-dimensional figure as cut from a "sheet of tin"?
    1) The boy has no love for his father.
    2) The boy is unable to understand his father.
    3) The father is a shallow person who has no feelings.
    4) The father acts mechanically without knowing why he does what he does.

46. What type of family structure best describes the Snapes family?
    1) patriarchal
    2) matriarchal
    3) hierarchical
    4) autocratic

47. What need of the boy is best expressed by his thoughts upon his first visit to the De Spain home?
    1) aggression
    2) security
    3) acceptance
    4) success

48. Why are both "The Use of Force" and "Barn Burning" appropriate examples of the effect of the complex world upon literature?
    1) They both illustrate some of the various forces of life in a society that contribute toward behavior.
    2) They both deal with children who are complex.
    3) They both emphasize the economic struggle of families.
    4) They both show the futility of resistance to forces over which we have no control.

49. Why is Albee's play so difficult to understand?
    1) Its interpretation is entirely up to the audience.
    2) It is told in form of a fantasy.
    3) The "Angel of Death" is a young man.
    4) It is too artificial to keep the reader's or audience's interest.

50. What is a reasonable explanation for the simple dialogue used by the playwright in the play?
    1) The time of the action in the play demanded solemnity and hence little speechmaking.
    2) Much of what people say is not anymore meaningful than the dialogue in the play.
    3) The characters are intended to represent the common man and woman.
    4) The main story is emphasized by the staging and lighting and not the dialogue.